

“THE METROPOLIS OF THE WEST”: THE CAMERA, THE LOCOMOTIVE, AND  
THE IMAGINED WEST IN THE MAKING OF MODERN AMERICA

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“The Metropolis of the West”: The Camera, the Locomotive, and the Imagined West in  
the Making of Modern America

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The purpose of this thesis is to track the development of American visual culture over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century to identify the impact of the photography of the construction of the transcontinental railroad on the way American culture producers imagined their Western Frontier. Through a close analysis of the style, form, and function of various visual artifacts from early-modern and modern American artists, I have come to the conclusion that the photography of the transcontinental railroad played a substantial role in transforming the American visual culture to celebrate the machine, find safety in the institutions of government and capitalism, and champion the greater industrialization of the American nation. The results of this thesis provide strong evidence that not only did the transformation of the visual culture play a large role in shaping American modernity, but it did so by reimagining America’s Western Frontier.

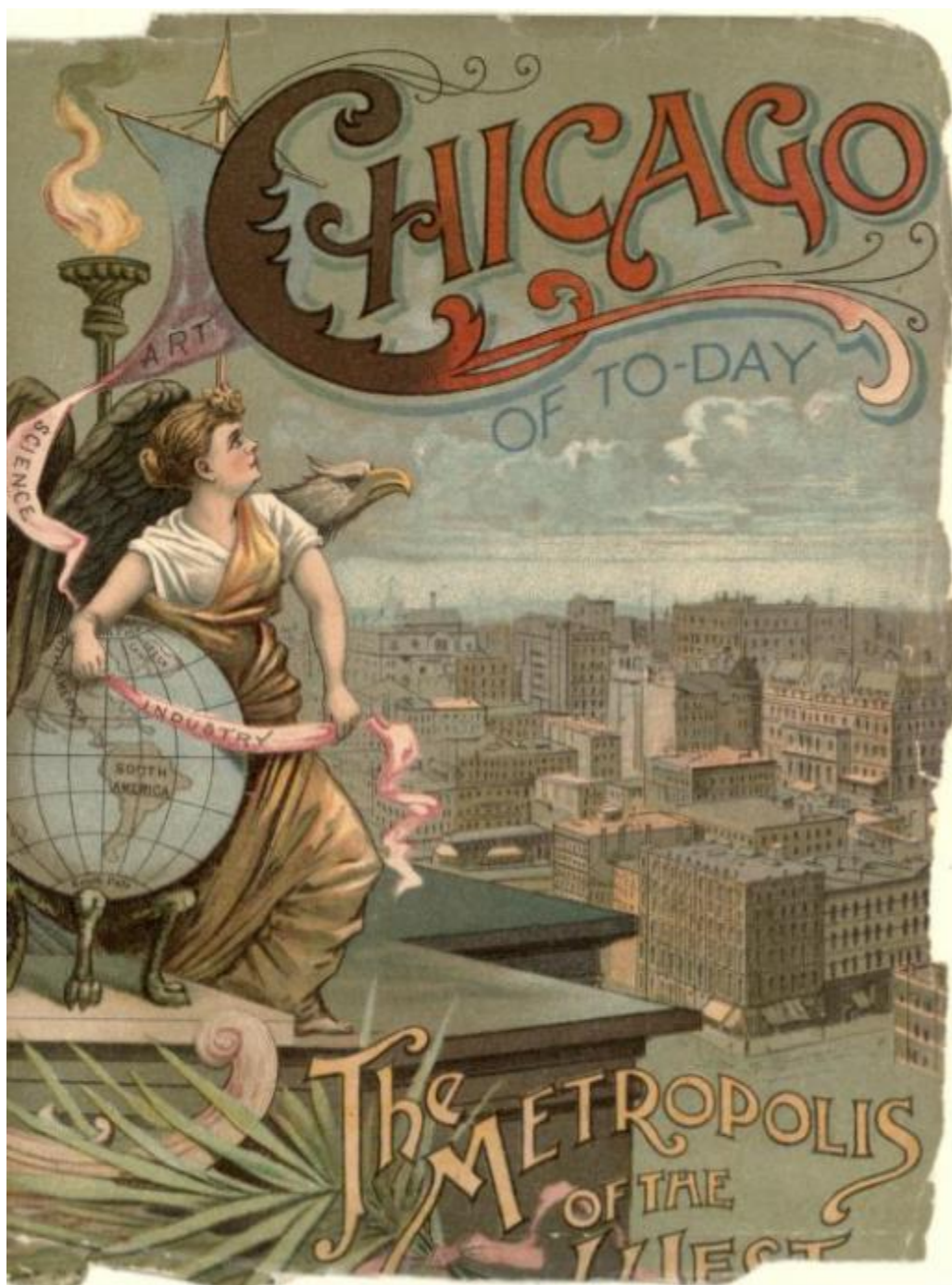
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## The West Was All but Won



*Chicago of to-day. The Metropolis of the West. The nation's choice for the World's Columbian Exposition... 1891. Published by Acme Publishing and Engraving Co., Chicago.*

Travelers to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair: Columbian Exposition may have noticed an advertisement nurturing the notion of Chicago as 'the Metropolis of the West.'<sup>1</sup> The poster illustrated a sprawling city of white brick overlooked by a young woman grasping a cloth that declaimed the words art, science, and industry. To her side rested a mighty eagle, a lit torch, and a globe precariously spun to the sight of the Western Hemisphere. The young woman and her accoutrements were a symbol of America's past Manifest Destiny; the young woman was America's divine providence, the eagle a symbol of freedom, the torch a symbol of civilization, and the globe a remembrance of America's expansion through the continent. Despite her posturing, she no longer overlooked the frontiersmen and settlers of America's Western Frontier. Rather, as if providing some metaphorical transition from one American destiny to another, she now overlooked the modern metropolis and America's future as an industrial power. The notion that the American mission had transformed in the late nineteenth century was even more apparent to Americans visiting Chicago in the early 1890s as they wandered down the Midway Plaisance at the World's Fair and through the white marbled pillars that guarded the entrance to the Manufacturers and Liberal Arts Building. Draped with American flags, the building was the size of an aircraft hangar and celebrated exhibits of American industry; fulfilling the promise of art, science, and industry that the young woman of the poster grasped as she overlooked 'the Metropolis of the West.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Chicago of to-day. The Metropolis of the West. The nation's choice for the World's Columbian Exposition... 1891*, published by Acme Publishing and Engraving Co., 1891. Americana Collection at the University of Illinois urbana- Champaign. Accessed August 15, 2017. <https://archive.org/details/chicagooftodayme00acme>.

<sup>2</sup> *Manufacturers Building*, Chicagology, accessed April 8, 2018. <https://chicagology.com/columbiaexpo/fair010/>.

Regardless of the fanciful vision of the future that the term ‘Metropolis of the West’ evoked in the minds of Americans, it also carried significant consequences for the American identity. For a century after the founding of the American nation the West was imagined as culturally opposed to industrialization and essential to the fledgling nation’s future as an agricultural and pastoral society.<sup>3</sup> The American President Thomas Jefferson and other intellectuals of the early-modern associated the cultivation of America’s West and a rejection of manufacturing with a strong democracy.<sup>4</sup> The historian Frederick Jackson Turner proposed that the West was where America “derived all that was distinctive from its brief history: democratic institutions, national unity, a rugged independence, and individualism.”<sup>5</sup> If the West is, as early-modern Americans had imagined it, the basis of the American identity and intrinsically opposed to industrialization, then why in the 1890s did the term ‘metropolis of the West’ gain popularity?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The conviction that the bountiful and vacant lands, to use the words of the historian Henry Nash, of the American continent would furnish republican values and protect the future of a pastoral and agricultural American nation had and continues to be proposed in various histories. John F. Kasson in his book *Civilizing the Machine* states that “the image of agrarian America was intensified and transformed into a revolutionary symbol of Republican virtue.” Leo Marx in his book *The Machine in the Garden* argues that the pastoral ideal, i.e. the yearning for a natural life, defined the American experience up until it had been transformed by the machine. Henry Smith in his book *Virgin Land* suggests that the West was magnetic in the hearts and minds of Americans and continental expansion was a “principal ingredient in the developing American nationalism.” See, John F. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), pg. 4; Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pg. 7; and Henry Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (London: Harvard University Press, 1950), pg. 3-12.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Jefferson believed in a nation of farmers and was critical of the great manufacturing cities of Europe as he believed a class of people that toils away without owning is the quickest way to a corrupt democracy. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, “Chapter 19,” Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1787.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” Presentation at *The World’s Columbian Exposition*, Chicago, Illinois, 1893.

<sup>6</sup> Metropolis is greek for mother city but more commonly known to Americans of the 19th century as a densely packed center of industry.



The simple answer to this genuinely complex question is that the way Americans imagined their Western Frontier in cultural productions had transformed over time. As the machine had begun to dominate the political economy and the associations of average Americans, so too had the machine begun to transform the way in which American cultural producers treated the subject of the West. The development of a national capitalist economy, more persuasive systems of communication and transportation, the gradual shift from the cultivation of raw materials to mechanical production, and the establishment of a governmental system that was favorable to capitalists has been well documented by historians and had altered the material conditions of those producing and consuming culture.<sup>7</sup> Leo Marx explored the impact of the machine on the development of western themed literature in his seminal book *Machine in the Garden*.<sup>8</sup> His conclusion

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<sup>7</sup> These reorganizations of the relations of production are often argued as being embodied by—according to a popular line of historical thought by historians such as Richard Slotkin, Robert V. Hine, Christian Wolmar, Richard White, and many others—the construction of America's first transcontinental railroad. Though these historians differ somewhat in the details—for instance, Wolmar surmises it “changed the very nature of America” in ushering in a manufacturing society while White suspects that it was an economic failure but produced a new political order of corporate welfare—this line of historical thought is based on the notion that some part of the transcontinental railroad endeavor revolutionized the way the American political economy operated and, therefore, had a significant impact on the nation going forward. The American consciousness, as any materialist in a Marxist view of history would have argued, followed suite. See, Charles William Calhoun, editor, *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007); Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A New Interpretive History* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000); Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Frontier: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800-1890* (New York : Atheneum, 1985); Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2012); Christian Wolmar, *The Great Railroad Revolution: The History of Trains in America* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2012). Critical Marxist theory comprehends the world in two realms; the base- or the the material world of “societes relations to production”- and the superstructure- or the of “law, politics, and ideology.” In Marxist theory, the base must transform as a precondition to changes in the superstructure as “social revolutions occur... when the relations of production have become fetters on the productive forces.” These historians are determining a world where the material conditions had transformed and the American consciousness had adapted to it, a adherence to a critical Marxist theory of history. See S.H. Rigby, *Marxism and History: A Critical Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pg. 177-207.

<sup>8</sup> Marx, *Machine in the Garden*.

was that pastoral idealism, or America's idealization of a natural life, transformed in the wake of the machine to produce an American identity that truly championed industry. Marx had provided evidence for a greater transformation in American cultural thought that, according to Marx's argument, had served industrialism.<sup>9</sup>

A significant and distinct player in this cultural shift that had hitherto gone relatively unnoticed by historians is the visual culture. Particularly, the way in which the visual culture imagined the Western Frontier in cultural works and how the nineteenth and early twentieth century engendered a substantial development in the American visual culture due in a large part to the technological prowess of the camera and presence of mechanical means of transportation and production. The camera, a machine unto itself, offered Americans a different vision of progress, one based on the institutions of capitalism and industrial development, that makes visual culture of particular interest when exploring the advent of modernity in America. The purpose of this thesis, then, is to track this development in American visual culture through the nineteenth and early twentieth century to argue that its unique transformation at the hands of a machine dominated world is evidence of a greater revolution in American cultural thought that had served to champion industry. The method through which this analysis will occur is by pinpointing specific visual cultural artifacts from American producers of the era to not only prove that a transformation in style, form, and function had occurred but also that

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<sup>9</sup> For an alternate reading that places much less emphasis on the West in the cultural transformation at the end of the nineteenth century see Alan Trachtenberg's book *The Incorporation of America*. Trachtenberg argues that the cause of this transformation was located in the new corporate system that had evolved to dominate large businesses and, therefore, the large amount of working people who found themselves employed under them or anyone participating in the new consumer culture that they produced. Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), pg. 3.

this transformation had reimagined the American West to celebrate the locomotive, embrace powerful governmental and capitalistic institutions, abandon human centrality, decimate the significance of time, space, and western movement, and, above all else, produce a modern American identity. While the early-modern world had envisioned a West that was faithful to the goal of an agrarian and pastoral future, the modern world had reimagined the West in the visual sphere to serve as the backbone for American industrial dominance in the twentieth century.

American cultural identity at the turn of the nineteenth century was defined by its need to ‘civilize’ the ‘savage’ space of the West. This westward and often violent expansion throughout the continent, later known as Manifest Destiny, was not only on the minds of average Americans but also the active goal of the American government and its institutions. “Chapter I: The Final Frontier” will employ the famous mural study of Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze titled *Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way* and other painted works of the early-modern to explore how American cultural producers portrayed and shaped the early-modern world they inhabited. These visual cultural works reveal a strong right-to-left composition, a heroic virile quality assigned to settlers and frontiersmen as the controlling free agents of expansion, and a divine or humanitarian justification for conquest through symbolism. These artistic styles, alongside the form and function of the paintings themselves, produced a visual culture that not only supported Manifest Destiny but nationalized it.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The historian Roger Cushing Aiken explained that American art of the nineteenth century had been “characterized as more didactic, nationalistic, and religious and less purely art for art’s sake than Old World pictures. Roger Cushing Aiken, “Paintings of Manifest Destiny: Mapping the Nation,” *American Art* Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn, 2000), pg. 68.

Despite the reliance on Manifest Destiny to guide a vision of the future for a majority of the nineteenth century, America at the turn of the twentieth century had transformed to a society increasingly dominated by machine based production. “Chapter II: Manufacturing a New Reality on the Transcontinental Railroad” will employ the photographs of the construction of the first American transcontinental railroad by Alfred A. Hart and Andrew J. Russell as evidence for a complete devastation of the early-modern ideals and artistic styles established in the first chapter. This analysis will survey the various ways that the new technology of the camera and these photographs in particular imagined a Western Frontier and greater American nation that praised the importance of the power structures of capitalism and the machine world it begot as paramount to societal advancement. The conclusions that this chapter draws is that this transformation in the visual culture played a substantial role in shaping the development of modernity in America.

As the twentieth century progressed and more advanced forms of entertainment were popularized, the Western Frontier was cemented in the image framed by the photographs of Andrew J. Russell and Alfred A. Hart. “Chapter Three: The Moving Picture, The Western, and *The Iron Horse*” jumps to 1924 to explore how the film *The Iron Horse* built a western setting familiar to audiences of the transcontinental railroad photography. The institutions of government and capitalism, as well as the machine, were portrayed as dominant forces on the frontier. Still, the film places an emphasis on the values and beliefs of an early-modern frontiersmen as the protagonist of the film. This ‘early-modern hero,’ in a surprising twist, underlines a challenge to modernity. Ultimately, of course, he is assimilated into a modern culture but it is in this conflict that

the film *The Iron Horse* separates itself from the photography of the construction of the transcontinental railroad to better help Americans of the early twentieth century grapple with the machine dominated world that now fully engulfed them. Employing the West as a battlefield for the creation of a modern identity not only plays into the once virile frontiersmen myth but also connects America's fabled frontier past to America's modern industrial present. By surveying these three eras of visual culture in America, it will become apparent that not only did the photography of the construction of the transcontinental railroad alter the way American cultural producers envisioned their Western Frontier but is also strong evidence for a radical transformation in cultural thought that rallied Americans to champion industry.

### **One Railroad to Rule Them All**

With one stroke of his ink-lined quill, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Pacific Railway Act into law on July 1, 1862.<sup>11</sup> A decades long argument in American politics surrounding the construction of a transcontinental railroad finally adjourned as the act proceeded through the checks and balances of the United States government with inescapable popularity. It passed the House of Representatives with an overwhelming majority of 104-21 and similarly in the Senate 35-5.<sup>12</sup> The act authorized the creation of the Union Pacific Railroad and Telegraph Company as a private entity and set forth the

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<sup>11</sup> The ink-quilled pen remark is the way this scene was represented in the film *The Iron Horse* so it may not be completely accurate. *The Iron Horse*, directed by John Ford (William Fox Corporation; 1924); Pacific Railway Act, July 1, 1862; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1996; Record Group 11; General Records of the United States Government; National Archives.

<sup>12</sup> For more information on the specifics of the vote, see *The Congressional Globe*, Senate, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, pg. 2840; *The Congressional Globe*, House of Representatives, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, pg. 905.

framework for which the transcontinental railroad was organized and funded. As the distance was far too great for one company to manage, the Union Pacific was tasked with constructing only half of the transcontinental railroad starting in Nebraska. The Central Pacific Railroad Company was awarded the duty of constructing the other half starting in California and through the treacherous Sierra Nevada Mountains, some of the most difficult terrain along the journey.<sup>13</sup> The meeting of the two disparate tracks would signal the completion of America's first transcontinental railroad. While no location was planned in 1862, eventually Promontory Summit, Utah was chosen.

1862 was not all smiles and celebrations. More than a year passed since the secession of the southern states from the American Union and Fort Sumter had fallen to the newly formed military of the South. The Confederate States of America, as they had begun to call themselves, led by the newly inaugurated President Jefferson Davis was in open rebellion against the United States. 1862 was in the height of the war. Major battles at Big Bethel, the Battle of Bull Run, the Battle of Wilson's Creek, the Battle of Mill Springs, and the Battle of Roanoke Island—just to name a few—were already fought and the American navy had blockaded the southern port cities in North Carolina. July 1, 1862, the day Lincoln signed the Pacific Railway Act, witnessed the tail end of a bloody battle where General Lee of the Confederacy, one of the most famous generals of the war, attacked the Union's Army of the Potomac. The Seven Days Battles witnessed nearly 40,000 American casualties. The following year did not fare well for the American military effort. The Confederacy had invaded the North, only to be stopped in Pennsylvania at the Battle of Gettysburg, almost exactly a year from the signing of the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pg. 102.

Pacific Railway Act. Yet, that fateful day in 1862 in Washington D.C. was dedicated not to war, nor to the old institutions of aristocracy and slavery that guided the Confederacy, rather to the idealized notions of a united nation; of a nation to be guided by the new industrial order of manufacturing and industrialization; of a locomotive that revolutionized and, more importantly, united the nation.<sup>14</sup>

The Pacific Railway Act funded a deep and intricate welfare system for the Central and Union Pacific Railroad Companies so that construction on the transcontinental railroad would not be slowed or halted by a shortage of funds.<sup>15</sup> Though many of the founders and primary investors in these companies claimed they risked ‘honor and fortune’ to build the transcontinental railroad, Richard White argues that they had none of either.<sup>16</sup> The Pacific Railway act guaranteed both companies a loan of between \$16,000 and \$48,000 by the United States Government for each mile of track laid. The difficulty of the terrain was the measure by which the loan amount changed. \$16,000 was for entirely flat land like the grasslands of Montana while \$48,000 was for the treacherous mountains of the Sierra Nevada in California and beyond. Further revisions of the Pacific Railway Act awarded these loans before any tracks were actually laid.<sup>17</sup> 1865 was one of these revisions as Congress granted both companies \$2,000,000

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<sup>14</sup> The Civil War has a long historical tradition that spans as far back as the ending of the war. Americans have always been interesting in its battles or politics or probably most importantly its legacy on the nation. See, *Shelby Foote, The Civil War: A Narrative, 3 vols (New York: Vintage Books, 1986)*; William E. Gienapp, *Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War in America: A Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2002); Adam Goodheart, *1861: The Civil War Awakening* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012); Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961).

<sup>15</sup> It is the thesis of Richard White’s book *railroaded* that this intricate corporate welfare system was the catalyst for a modern America. White, *Railroaded: the Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 26.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 27.

in loans, an advance on 100 miles of track at \$20,000 a mile. The government also granted these companies land surrounding the tracks, land that upon completion would be worth a fortune. Moreover, the Union and Central Pacific issued bonds, essentially a second mortgage on their construction as they borrowed money on the reputation of a company that was already in debt to the U.S. government. Ultimately, the land and loans would prove advantageous as interest rates were low and the capital funded the sole ownership of the rails and some of its surrounding land by the Union and Central Pacific Railroad Companies, no doubt an awesome money-making machine.<sup>18</sup>

Construction of the western spur of the transcontinental railroad began on January 8, 1863. It heralded a new beginning for the citizens of California and an era of economic opportunity for the chief officers of the Central Pacific Railroad Company. Known by the nickname of the “Big Four,” Leland Stanford, Mark Hopkins, Charles Crocker, and Collis Potter Huntington stood to gain an enormous fortune.<sup>19</sup> After years of planning, preparation, and lobbying the United States government, the western spur of the transcontinental railroad finally had the funding and permission to break ground. The celebration was centered on a wooden stage dressed in nationalistic garb in the middle of Front Street in Sacramento, California. The “Big Four,” except for Huntington as he remained in Washington, stood ready to rally the crowd in preparation for the first

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> The “Big Four” as they were known by the public or the associates as they were known internally are a rather fascinating aspect of the history of the transcontinental railroad and have been written on extensively. In these writing, they are often lionized as key contributors to the transcontinental railroad. See, Oscar Lewis, *The Big Four: The Story of Huntington, Stanford, Hopkins, and Crocker, and of the Building of the Central Pacific* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012); Alton Pryor, *The Big Four Railroad Barons and Other Railroad Stories* (Createspace Independent Publishing, 2014); Richard Rayner, *The Associates: Four Capitalists Who Created California* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009).



shovelful of dirt that marked the official launch of construction.<sup>20</sup> Though January 8 was a rather sunny California day, seemingly perfect for this type of ceremony, it had rained heavily the night before.<sup>21</sup> The dirt that lined the streets of Sacramento had turned to mud and water filled the city. Even with the horrid conditions for spectators a large crowd happily attended. Near the rain-drenched wooden platform where the speakers spoke and crowds gathered en masse to listen was a banner revealing hands clasped across the country. It included the words *May the Bond Be Eternal*.<sup>22</sup> While the bond they were celebrating that day was that of the east and the west coasts of the nation, it is hard to imagine there was not a greater meaning behind it as the nation was in the midst of a disastrous Civil War.

The transcontinental railroad never truly united the coasts of the United States as its tracks spanned from California to Nebraska. Passengers that boarded in California were forced to disembark in Nebraska and board a second train for the east. No single track spanned from New York to California. No single track had the luxury of viewing the waves of the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. It should come as no surprise that the groundbreaking for the transcontinental railroad in the east was not in Boston or New York City or even Chicago. Not even St. Louis where an enormous monument in the shape of an arch was later built in 1963 to honor westward expansion was chosen as the site for the construction of the eastern spur of the transcontinental railroad.<sup>23</sup> Instead, Omaha, Nebraska was awarded the opportunity to host the groundbreaking ceremony and

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<sup>20</sup> Adele Nathan, *The Building of the First Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Random House, 1950), pg. 71-79.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> David Haward Bain, *Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Penguin Group, 1999), pg.122.

<sup>23</sup> Tracy Campbell, *The Gateway Arch: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

starting point for the Union Pacific. Though the Union Pacific ran into some problems as the ceremony did not commence until eleven months after the Central Pacific's Sacramento groundbreaking ceremony, it still included the same fixings: brass bands, fireworks, cannons, and speeches. Yet, for all the pomp and fanfare, not many people showed up.<sup>24</sup> Governor Alvin Saunders of Nebraska turned the first shovelful of dirt that marked the beginning of the Union Pacific Railroad Company's construction.<sup>25</sup> Except it didn't. Following quickly after the ceremony were quarrels deciding where, exactly, the railroad should go. It seems that people soon realized the work would be harder and cost more than anybody had dreamed.<sup>26</sup> Another eighteen months passed before the first rail was laid and the track finally commenced its stretch into the last bits of frontier lands.

In the meantime the Central Pacific had begun construction from Sacramento. Its first great task was easy. Miles of relatively flat land. That is, until they approached the American River and the steep cliffs of Cape Horn, California. The only contemporary source actually written from Cape Horn was made by Chief Engineer of the Central Pacific Samuel S. Montague in a *Report of the Chief Engineer* stating, "The work at Cape Horn has proved less difficult and expensive than was first anticipated."<sup>27</sup> Still, the necessary work to clear a path along the rockwall for the tracks was not an easy task. In writing correspondence from Sacramento, E.B. Crocker, a member of the 'Big Four,' described the process by which the Chinese and white laborers were dealing with the rock:

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pg. 136; Nathan, pg. 93.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Nathan, pg. 93.

<sup>27</sup> Edson T Strobridge, "The Central Pacific Railroad and the Legend of Cape Horn 1865-1866," *Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum*, Published 2001/Accessed April 12, 2017, [http://cprh.org/Museum/Cape\\_Horn.html](http://cprh.org/Museum/Cape_Horn.html).

Friend Huntington,

Never at any time has the work looked so well. The workman apparently working so diligently & everything moving so orderly. That work at the Summit is moving lively. The rock is full of seams. The men work the earth out of the seams with long hooked iron rods & then a keg or so of powder is fixed in them which cleans out and opens the seam, then 10 or 20 kegs are put in & the explosion sends rock flying clear out of the way. This side hill rock cutting, though it looks large, is the cheapest & quickest got out of the way. That Summit work will all be ready before the track can be laid to the Summit.

Yours truly,  
s/ E.B. Crocker<sup>28</sup>

The work was exhausting and dangerous. In the years to come a myth would arise that Chinese laborers were hung from the cliff wall in baskets along thousand foot precipices. According to the historian Edson T. Strobridge, this myth is simply false and these types of fabrications have been slowly increasing in grandour since the 1860s.<sup>29</sup> Cape Horn was an experiment in how best to decimate the rock walls that guarded the Sierra Nevada Mountains.<sup>30</sup> The Central Pacific's remaining success was founded on the disheveled rock that lay at the foot of Cape Horn. Bill Dadd, author of the *Great Transcontinental Railroad Guide* written in 1869 remarked,

When the road was in the course of construction, the groups of Chinese laborers on the bluffs looked almost like swarms of ants, when viewed from the (American) river. Years ago, the cunning savage could only find a very round-about trail by which to ascend the point, where now the genius and energy of the pale face has laid a broad and safe road whereon the iron steed carries its living freight swiftly and safely on their way to and from ocean to ocean.<sup>31</sup>

Back in Omaha, Nebraska the Union Pacific had been delayed and hammered with misfortune. Eventually, though, construction began and twelve thousand men found

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Bill Dadd, *Great Transcontinental Railroad Guide* (New York: Geo. A. Crofutt & Co., 1869).

themselves on the frontier. All the hustle and bustle of the rising towns could be attributed to General Dodge who had finally sent out the surveyors, graders, and bridge-builders ahead of construction.<sup>32</sup> The men that came to work the tracks were mostly Irish, some newly American and had just arrived from Ireland. Others were former soldiers of the Confederacy or the Union armies and they wore their grays and blues mixed with other garments to protect from the sun and dust.<sup>33</sup> The Union Pacific was building rapidly through the plains as the Central Pacific was entrenched in the Sierra Nevadas. The Union Pacific, however, had to deal with a large amount of Native American Indian attacks. Laborers were equipped with rifles and revolvers and were the frontline defence against these sort of distractions. At one point during construction a group of Native American Indians from the Brule Sioux tribe under the leadership of Spotted Tail were cordially invited to view the locomotive and construction of the tracks.<sup>34</sup> A contest had been proposed; a race between the locomotive and the Sioux's riders on horseback. A spectator recalled

And away they went. At first they outdistanced the locomotive, which some pleased them that they gave their indian war whoop. Presently the engine gathering speed, overhauled them. The engineer as he passed opened his whistle, which so startled them, that all, as if by word of command, swung to the offside of their ponies... Of course this incident ended the race, and the engine and the indians, the latter much crestfallen, returned to the boarding train.<sup>35</sup>

The race was a great metaphor. For no matter how much the Native American Indians defended their land through means of negotiation or violence, the industrialization of

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<sup>32</sup> Nathan, pg. 100.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pg. 101.

<sup>34</sup> Bain, 267-268.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

America seems to have been destined to destroy the old West just as the locomotive had outraced the horses.

On May 10, 1869 The Central and Union Pacific Railroad Companies finally met. Nearly seven years had passed since President Abraham Lincoln signed the Pacific Railway Act; Lincoln himself now dead by assassination.<sup>36</sup> Ulysses S. Grant sat in his stead riding on a surge of popularity from his role in the Civil War. Early that afternoon the locomotives *Jupiter* and *Engine No. 119* gingerly motioned into position followed by a line of cars.<sup>37</sup> They did not carry construction materials, laborers, or other such materials for the construction efforts but instead they held a very special cargo. They harbored governors, important persons, and the industrialists that oversaw the grand planning of the endeavor.<sup>38</sup> 1800 miles of track had been laid, iron spanned half the continent. It was an impressive feat of engineering and sheer willpower.<sup>39</sup>

As people gathered in Promontory Summit, Utah to listen to the ceremonial speeches and take part in history, groups gathered in numerous American cities waiting for the telegram that would mark the official completion of the transcontinental railroad. The ceremony included brief speeches from Governor Stanford and General Dodge followed by a rather long prayer from the reverend Mr. Todd.<sup>40</sup> The laborers grew impatient.<sup>41</sup> “We have got done praying. The Spike is about to be presented” tapped out a telegraph operator to the people listening back east.<sup>42</sup> Two golden spikes from California,

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<sup>36</sup> Michael W. Kauffman, *American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2004).

<sup>37</sup> Nathan, pg. 155.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 160.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

a single silver spike from Nevada, a spike plated in silver and gold from Arizona, and one measly iron spike symbolized the end of a grande feat; the connection of the east and west by rail. As the ceremony came to an end Governor Leland Stanford, President of the Central Pacific, stood across from Thomas Durant, President of the Union Pacific, each with a silver sledgehammer connected to telegraph lines in hand.<sup>43</sup> Half a world behind each back?” wrote Bret Harte an American poet and short story writer.<sup>44</sup> Three blows from the hammers and the nation would realize the transcontinental railroad was finally complete. Cannons fired, bells rattled, fire gongs thundered, and whistles shrieked across the nation as the telegram popped three times.<sup>45</sup> The nation rejoiced. All those years earlier at the commencement ceremony for the Central Pacific hung a banner muttering the incredible words *May the Bond Be Eternal*. Now, in 1869, the Civil War had ended—the nation whole once more—and the transcontinental railroad was no longer a dream of fabled men rather a reality that had taken the phrase *May the Bond Be Eternal* and produced a shocking reality of a nation closer in its commerce and travel but also in its relationships and culture than ever before in its history.<sup>46</sup>

The construction of America’s first transcontinental railroad may have officially finished on May 10, 1869 but its legacy never died. The unification of the nation by mechanical means would set up a cultural struggle with wider implications for American identity. It not only fashioned a national economy and reorganized politics but, more importantly for this thesis, through the mechanical camera that followed its progress,

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<sup>43</sup> Bain, pg. 666.

<sup>44</sup> Francis Bret Harte, “What the Engines Said: Opening of the Pacific Railroad,” in *Yale Book of American Verse*, ed. Thomas R. Lounsbury (Yale University Press, 1913).

<sup>45</sup> Bain, pg. 667.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, pg. 122.

shaped American visual culture. The photography produced by Alfred A. Hart and Andrew J. Russell of its construction sculpted a vision of the Western Frontier that survives to this day. It forever linked the machine to the West and decimated early-modern ideals of space. It abandoned the myth of the heroic virile frontiersmen in favor of iron. It celebrated governmental and capitalist institutions as structures of power capable of great progress. Industrialization had captured the minds of average Americans and the photography of the construction of the transcontinental railroad envisioned a West that sanctioned such a radical reorganization and celebrated its outcome. As the machine had won the West at Promontory Summit, Utah, the machine had also won the hearts and minds of the American people with the assistance of the photographs of the construction of the transcontinental railroad.

## Chapter I: The Final Frontier



*Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* by Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze. (Mural Study, U.S. Capitol).



Incorporated on the wall above one of the many marbled staircases in the U.S. Capitol Building is Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze's *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*; a mural study celebrating the American westward spirit.<sup>47</sup> Leutze was born in Germany in 1816 and immigrated to the United States as a child. While he returned to Europe numerous times in his adult life to study painting and even started a family with a German woman, his paintbrush remained on the pulse of the American experience.<sup>48</sup> His most famous painting is often cited as *Washington Crosses the Delaware*; an oil on canvas masterpiece that sits more than twelve feet tall and twenty one feet long in its gold frame at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>49</sup>

Created in 1851, it depicts a heroic George Washington leading a band of colonial soldiers in a surprise attack against the Hessian troops at the Battle of Trenton. That same year, the *New York Times* confidently asserted that Leutze's *Washington Crosses the Delaware* was "probably the greatest historical picture in the country" and it was in this prominence that Leutze was chosen in 1860 by the



*Washington Crosses the Delaware* by Emanuel Leutze. (Oil on canvas, 1851).

<sup>47</sup> Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*, 1861, Mural Study, U.S. Capitol Building, Smithsonian American Art Museum Renwick Gallery, District of Columbia, United States.

<sup>48</sup> Ian Chilvers, "Leutze, Emanuel Gottlieb (24 May 1816)," *The Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists*, 5 ed., 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, 1851, oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, New York. Jochen Wierich argues that *Washington Crosses the Delaware* "captured... [the] imagination... of many Americans searching for national symbols in an era of sectionalism and disunity." Jochen Wierich, *Grand Themes: Emanuel Leutze, Washington Crossing the Delaware, and the American History Painting* (Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 2012) Pg. 20.

United States government to paint a mural study in the U.S. Capitol Building.<sup>50</sup> *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* was completed in 1861, just as the threat of civil war loomed over the nation.

Leutze took the name *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* from the famous last verse of George Berkeley's 1726 poem *Patriotism*. It goes:

Westward the course of empire takes its way  
The first four acts already past;  
A fifth shall close the drama with the day;  
Time's noblest offspring is the last.<sup>51</sup>

Just as Berkeley sat and wrote with the West as his muse, Leutze's mural illustrated the American westward spirit through a grand scene of settlement and struggle.<sup>52</sup> The setting of the mural was the American West in all its wild glory and the main actors a congregation of settlers resting atop a rock formation amid a wagon train at the continental divide. At their backs were settlers struggling through the rough terrain and at their fronts the sun descending over the westward horizon. The mural's ornate border included heroes of the American West such as Daniel Boone (1734-1820) who explored the Kentucky region and William Clark (1770-1838) who explored the Oregon Territory alongside mythical and biblical characters like Moses and Hercules. Leutze was fascinated with the spirit of exploration and sought to link settlement of the American West with great explorers of biblical, mythological, and historical prominence.

Leutze's mural study is the quintessential representation of the American early-modern artistic attitude toward the West. Upon a closer examination of it and a few other

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<sup>50</sup> Harvey Rachlin, *Scandals, Vandals, and Da Vincis: A Gallery of Remarkable Art Tales* (New York: Penguin, 2007) pg. 190.

<sup>51</sup> George Berkeley, "I. Patriotism," *On the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America* (1726).

<sup>52</sup> Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*.

select paintings of a similar nature from the same era, certain artistic styles emerge that reaffirmed and produced a greater cultural belief that the American civilization had within it the seed of progress- a seed that was divinely inspired- and, therefore, would spread to lands west in the future through natural settlement. The term Manifest Destiny was invented to capture this belief.<sup>53</sup> These artistic styles, constituting the organizing structure of this chapter, are as follows:

1. A right-to-left composition that portrays a greater societal move westward;
2. A visual virility surrounding settlers and frontiersmen as the controlling free agents of expansion;
3. The use of religious and humanitarian symbolism to justify conquest.

The prevalence of these three artistic styles in American art of the early-modern era imagined the West as a battlefield where frontiersmen built the rugged individualism that defined the American experience. This art was not meant for quiet contemplation but rather a justified rallying call to continue the struggle against nature and ‘savageness.’

A sizable part of the mystique surrounding these early-modern painted works was their unique ability, as a painted form, to present artificially complex scenes where the movement of actors was not the movement of a single expedition at a single point in time but rather an orchestra of movement over generations. This explosion of spacetime, i.e. the portrayal of a journey in many temporal and spacial locations on a single canvas, constructed and moderated an early-modern identity that viewed itself as part of a greater historical and even mythological move westward. The mural *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* depicts the explosion of space through the majestic panorama of the American wilderness that spans the grasslands and river beds to the right of the mural,

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<sup>53</sup> Robert J. Miller, *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny* (London: Praeger, 2006) Pg.120.

the imposing mountains of the continental divide in the middle, and the “Golden Gate” of the San Francisco Bay at its left. A plethora of settlers produce the paintings explosion of time as the viewer is presented with generations of American families moving westward along a wagon trail. This vast traversal of space and time, the explosion of spacetime that eminents from paintings of the era, was not possible in photography due to the technical limitations of capturing one scene at one point in time. It is in the domain of the painter to portray a journey not in one temporal or spacial location but, rather, many. The complexity and importance in such a method lies in the viewer’s necessity to not only contemplate but act to grip the painting’s meaning. To feel the explosion of spacetime and connect the movement of the painted settlers with a greater nationalistic movement that guided the American civilization.

The design of this chapter is to establish the value in the paintings, murals, and other painted forms of the early-modern as constructors and moderators of the early-modern American identity.<sup>54</sup> To analyze how these cultural artifacts played a significant role in shaping the way the West and, indeed, how the American nation itself was imagined by generations of Americans. Being able to witness the whole marvelous production of a westward journey through vast stretches of space and time in a single painted work framed the definitions for societal advancement, produced the rugged individualist American spirit, and justified conquest through a humanitarian or divine foundation. Though the painted form may only be one part of the culture that constructed and moderated the early-modern American identity, the unique way in which it visualized

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<sup>54</sup> The notion that artists were shapers of culture is a common theme. Barbara Novak argued that artists were shaped by an optimistic ideal and “they in turn, reflected and shaped [it].” Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) Pg. IX.

Manifest Destiny is crucial in analyzing the American nation of the eighteenth and nineteenth century that appropriated so much time, energy, and resources to continental expansion. Chapter II will employ these early-modern visual cultural identifiers- movement, virility/agency, and divinity/humanitarian aid- as well as the notion of spacetime to argue that the photography of the transcontinental railroad was so disparate in form, function, and style to the painted works of the early-modern that it threw the American identity into chaos and played a role in producing a new, more modern vision for the future of America.

### **Inevitably West**

The defining characteristic of the early-modern American identity was the widespread belief that the American civilization had a westward trajectory. The subsumption was that the culture, religion, and institutions of the American nation would vanquish and replace a type of ‘savageness’ or ‘wildness’ that persisted in the western lands. This westward movement of society incorporated a certain level futurity and decentralization that is best described by John O’Sullivan in an 1845 issue of the *Democratic Review*. Titled “Annexation,” O’Sullivan noted, “The Anglo-Saxon foot is already on [California’s] borders. Already the advance guard of the irresistible army of the Anglo-Saxon emigration has begun to pour down upon it, armed with the plough and rifle, marking its trail with schools and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meeting houses.”<sup>55</sup> He continues to argue that “[a]ll this [was accomplished] without agency of our government, without responsibility of our people- in the natural flow of

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<sup>55</sup> John O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, Volume 17 (New York: 1845), 5-6, 9-10.

events, the spontaneous working of principles, and the adaptation of the tendencies and wants of the human race to the elemental circumstances in the midst of which they find themselves placed.”<sup>56</sup> O’Sullivan witnessed the westward trajectory of society as both inevitable, in “the natural flow of events,” and guided by average Americans, “without agency of our government.”<sup>57</sup>

The belief that ‘civilization’ moves inevitably westward was a fashionable argument for early-modern scholars and is portrayed in the paintings of nineteenth century Americans as a leftward composition.<sup>58</sup> Imagine a compass placed flat on the canvas of a painting, to the right would be east and to the left, west. Paintings that direct the viewer's eyes first to the right side of the painting and then to the left side have a leftward narrative in that the viewer's eyes move, on that imaginary compass, ‘west.’ Roger Cushing Aiken in his article “Painting Manifest Destiny” asserted “[a]lmost all pictures of the great [American] migration employ leftward movement. Indeed, it is difficult to find any depiction of American westward expansion, or "progress," in high art or popular illustration that does not feature strong right-to-left, or "westward," movement.”<sup>59</sup> Even Leutze’s *Washington Crosses the Delaware*, a painting that had little to do with westward expansion, contains this movement.<sup>60</sup> The boat is aimed towards the left side of the painting and George Washington’s sturdy gaze towards the leftern shore

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> The eurocentric theory that civilization moves east to west is a popular topic among European and American intellectuals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bishop George Berkeley of England declared “westward the course of an empire takes its way.” The American reverend John Witherspoon proclaimed “true religion, and in her train, dominion, riches, literature, and art have taken their course in a slow and gradual manner from East to West.” Hine, pg. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Roger Cushing Aikin, “Paintings of Manifest Destiny: Mapping the Nation,” *American Art* Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn, 2000): pg. 80.

<sup>60</sup> Leutze, *Washington Crosses the Delaware*.

seems to have inspired his soldiers to look in the same direction. The shore of their embankment is shrouded in dark clouds and shadows whereas the open space to the left is illuminated in rays of sunshine. The viewer's eyes first notices the whole ordeal of the boat on the right, then the mass of soldiers and George Washington, finally following their gaze toward the illuminated leftern shore; a right-to-left composition. In reality, Washington and his army were heading east which, traditionally, should have had them facing the right side of the painting. The uniquely American sense of a world aligned right-to-left that even permeated throughout paintings as unrelated as *Washington Crosses the Delaware* is also evident in how European art of the era lacked such directional movement. Such foreign art did not entice viewers to participate in movement but instead often offered centered images meant for contemplation; drastically different from American art of same era that encouraged action.<sup>61</sup>

Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze's mural study *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* was successful in delineating Aiken's notion of leftward movement impeccably alongside the decentralization and futurity that O'Sullivan touched upon in his article "Annexation."<sup>62</sup> At first glance the viewer is susceptible to whole enterprise of movement that Leutze established. The mass of settlers painted alongside their animal drawn wagons all face in a leftward direction; leaning, pushing, and in a general struggle with the rough terrain. Even their eyes gaze leftward, leading their bodies on a journey of exploration. As the viewer focuses in on the individual characters they are invited to appreciate and empathize with the aspirations that accompanied the struggle westward. A handsome young settler among his family on the bottom-right of the mural dressed in red

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid and O'Sullivan.

with flowing brown hair and a finely trimmed beard is depicted with a weary demeanor in his soft eyes and slumped rosy cheeks. His anguish, born of fatigue and further rendered in the struggling settlers that came before him, is palpable in the lean of his body against a nearby bull. In spite of this, his chin remains high in the air and his eyes westward. The woman sitting on the wagon behind him, presumably his wife, dressed in a plaid red dress and yellow shawl with a toddler in her arms gazes westward in the same manner, her chin held high and eyes fixated. Their gazes were born of frustration and longing; a gaze of solemn hope in their leftward destination. The actors of the mural were depicted by Leutze in a perpetual struggle and infinite longing for those leftward wildlands; a representation of that greater western movement of society that the viewer would have connected to the American Manifest Destiny that perpetuated the early-modern American identity.

Leutze was particularly keen on employing luminescence to establish the prominence of the West in American identity and to place the responsibility of fulfillment of such a societal vision in the hands of settlers and frontiersmen. In the mural *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*, the western wildlands were illuminated by a setting sun that draped the wilderness to the left of the unfolding scene in a cloak of gold that set the leftward sky ablaze in hues of orange and yellow. These beautiful hues dissipated the farther to the right the viewers' eyes travel. The imagery of radiance presented by Leutze of America's West is akin to a heavenly paradise or a literal 'El Dorado.' Still, it is in the illuminated faces of settlers that this 'El Dorado' transforms from fiction to an achievable goal. One of these settlers is the blonde-haired man dressed in a blue shirt with a yellow scarf positioned below the major rock formation. Like many of his compatriots, he gazes



in a leftward direction with a hopeful smile. His hand delicately caressed his hair and his face illuminated by the setting sun; a symbol of a promised destiny in the West and the inherent goodness of his journey. Leutze's manipulation of the golden light of a setting sun to signify eminence in western lands and the manner in which that golden light illuminated the faces of struggling settlers provides a telling expose on western movement. Leutze employed this artistic symbolism to imagine the American struggle west as inherently good and the settlers moving West as finer in both a divine sense (achieving a heavenly destiny) and a secular sense (betterment of the American nation and its people.)

Discussing luminosity as it pertains to Leutze's mural would not be complete without a discussion of darkness and gloom. For as beautifully lit the western lands are in shades of gold, Leutze chose rather dark hues in his depiction of several other locations. Particularity gloomy was his depiction of the forests that distanced the resting settlers in the middle of the mural from their homes in the East and the rich golden lands of the West. Contrasting the rich glow of the golden sky, the forests are painted in shadows with deep greens, reds, browns, and blacks. The forest that lay to the left of the resting settlers is especially fascinating in the way it denotes struggle. Not only does it cloak the rest of the journey in darkness but a fallen tree lies as an obstacle. Not an untraversable obstacle, as two men lift axes high above their head ready to swing with all their force, but an obstacle that requires strength; that requires a certain amount of struggle to surpass. A wilderness that tests Americans at every turn of their journey. These shadowed areas present the conclusion that the early-modern American spirit was not only constructed in

the western lands that lay at the end of the journey but also in the struggle of Americans as they journeyed toward it.

Another rather dark location depicted by Leutze is the ruined walls to the right in the mural. Though small, the old world architecture is clear, almost Roman in nature, and holes from centuries of neglect dot its structure. A passing nod to the early-modern American vision of a decaying Europe, of a class of menial workers that struggle and toil under an aristocracy that affords them no land.<sup>63</sup> When contrasted with the golden cloaked wilderness of the leftern side of the mural, it is obvious that this ‘El Dorado’ that the settlers struggle toward is not that of a promised land in terms of some mythical ‘city of gold’ but rather the promise of open fertile land. A historical connection to the original settlers of North America, the Pilgrims, in their quest to escape government persecution in the fertile and open lands of the New World. Leutze placed a great emphasis on land and the yeoman farmer, visualizing the openness and fertility of the West as a golden light and the locked land of Europe in shadowed and decaying imagery.

At the center of the movement, of the grand ensemble of a society moving westward through vast swaths of uncharted land, was a single family resting atop a rock formation; the main actors of Leutze’s narrative. Their presence was the vehicle through which average Americans could see themselves within a grander framework of societal movement. The mother dressed in blue and white with a pink bonnet holds a newborn

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Jefferson argued that the lands of Europe were hoarded by its aristocracy. He states “In Europe the lands are either cultivated, or locked up against the cultivator.” Europe, therefore, was forced into an industrial paradigm to support the surplus of people who had no land of their own. America, on the other hand, has “an immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman.” Leutze’s portrayal of a decaying wall on the right of his mural and a golden wilderness to the left should be read as the contradiction between the decaying and locked land of Europe with the vast and prosperous American West that Thomas Jefferson and other intellectuals discussed. See Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, “Chapter 19” (Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1787); Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire takes Its Way*.

child in her arms as her older daughter sits next to her. The father looks down upon his family, his eyes and face hidden as his arm is outstretched toward that gold-cloaked wilderness that lay beyond. The newborn child being gifted the western lands is important imagery in that he symbolizes rebirth. A renewal of the American people in 'El Dorado,' or the promised land. Upon a closer examination, it is clear that Leutze centered the actions of all the other actors on this single family, on working to protect or guide the figurative rebirth of the American people. The blonde man just to the right of the family dressed in a red shirt stood astute with a rifle in his hand, a nod to the violence that was necessary as Americans spread westward. His lack of a military uniform a reminder that such violence was natural and not inspired or orchestrated by the government. The two men ahead of them shaded by the rock formation with axes held high are clearing the path toward the gold-cloaked land for the family. The settlers to their right on the wagon train establish a single line leading up towards family atop the rock, the history of western expansion to that point. Leutze was careful to portray westward movement and the eventual rebirth of the American people not as the movement of a government but as the movement of its people. As important as the agency of the government was in America's Manifest Destiny, as we know the military and other institutions to be particularly vital, the early-modern American identity did not acknowledge the government in western pursuits and in doing so constructed an American identity where rugged individualism was the key to advancement.

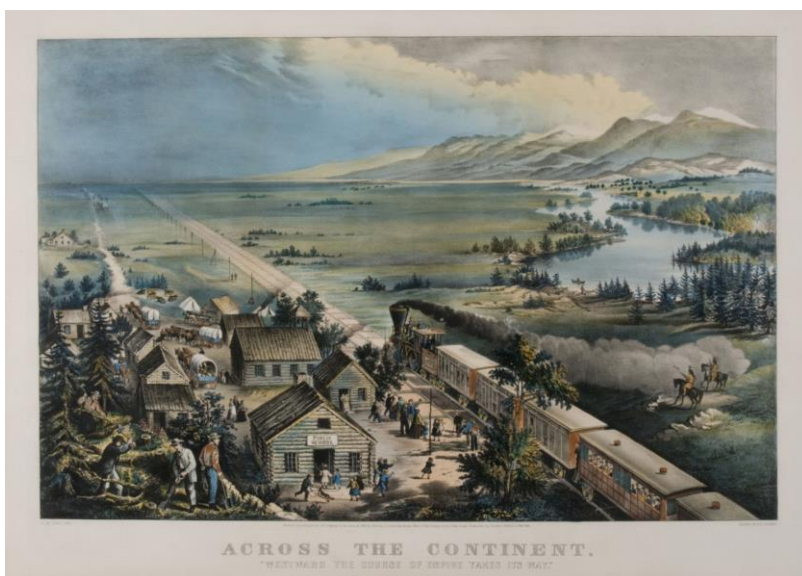
The timing of Leutze's mural is principle to the overall message discussed thus far. Contemporary to the mural, the *National Intelligencer* exclaimed "In these dark days of trial [the Civil War], we felt the beauty of the whole marvelous production, almost as a

prophetic conviction that the idea of our 'manifest destiny' could not perish."<sup>64</sup> Leutze's mural is an important work of art in the identity of Americans because at a time when the American union was on the brink of destruction; when a rebel force so threatened the whole of the American experiment, Leutze reminded people of the goodness of the American enterprise. *Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way*, then, emphasizes key aspects of the American early-modern identity and reinforces them in a time Americans began to doubt their existence. While Americans turned their attention away from the West and towards the armies of the Union and Confederacy that marched up and down the east coast, Leutze's mural illustrated the inherent goodness of the American mission by emphasizing the rugged independent American spirit that was illuminated by the light of a gold-cloaked land. The outstretched arms and longing gazes of the actors from America's pictorial past all the way to the newborn baby being gifted western lands by his father represented a linkage between America's fabled past and a future that some thought may never come. A rebirth that was direly needed in a time of crisis.

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<sup>64</sup> Leutze's Great Picture," *Daily National Republican* (January 15, 1863), p. 2. "Leutze's New Painting," *The National Intelligencer* 50 (November, 27, 1862), p. 3.

*Across the Continent. "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way"* by the English born but American raised artist Frances Flora Bond Palmer is yet another example of early-modern art portraying a westward trajectory of American society. The lithograph was



completed in 1868; after *Across the Continent. "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way"* by Frances Flora Bond Palmer. (Lithograph, 1868).

the end of the Civil War

and at the tail end of the construction of the first American transcontinental railroad.<sup>65</sup>

Though it was completed concurrent with photography of the transcontinental railroad and through a process by which the work could be mass produced, i.e lithography,

Palmer's work still employed the leftward composition that was presented in Leutze's mural that played a large part in imagining a world aligned east-to-west.<sup>66</sup>

In a similar manner to Leutze's mural, Palmer's lithograph represents a temporal portrait of westward migration. The cornerstone of Palmer's work is the railroad tracks that run from the bottom-right to the top-left of the lithograph. These tracks compose the

<sup>65</sup> Frances Flora Bond Palmer, *Across the Continent. "Westward the Course of Empire takes Its Way"*, 1868, hand-colored lithograph, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<sup>66</sup> "Lithography was the first fundamentally new printing technology since the invention of relief printing in the fifteenth century." Lithography allowed for the reproduction of increasingly detailed pictures. See "Color Printing in the Nineteenth Century: Lithography," *University of Delaware Library*, December 21, 2010/ July 14, 2017. <http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/exhibits/color/lithogr.htm>.

leftward composition as they force the spectator's eyes to be drawn to the lower portion of the tracks, on the right side of the lithograph, where the locomotive enters the image. As the spectator's eyes follow the tracks to their predetermined destination at the top-left of the lithograph, a virgin wilderness is the only site that remains. The contrast of the vast stretches of green lush land to the left of the image and the busy crowded village to the right is very similar to the way Leutze portrayed the West as golden and the east as shadowed. In both instances, the left of the images, i.e. the West, is depicted as a promised land and open to settlement.

The concept of futurity and decentralization also plays a role in Palmer's lithograph in that surrounding the locomotive is a sort of time progression. To the left of the locomotive, a log cabin village filled with settlers muddling about their day is contrasted with the more modern house farther up the dirt road. A wagon train leaves the village for a dirt road that trails off on the horizon even though a locomotive is depicted heading in the same direction. To the locomotive's right, two Native American Indians are literally being left in the dust of the locomotive, a symbol of a bygone era. The scene presented by Palmer was not meant to be taken as a literal portrait of a specific time but rather as symbols of a time progression. Every aspect of American society had been aimed westward; represented by Palmer as the locomotive, wagon trains, and modern housing. Yet, like Leutze's mural, systems of power, particularly the government, are suspiciously absent. Palmer's lithograph, therefore, reinforces Leutze's portrayal of early-modern American society as moving westward absent systems of power and without specific direction; other than westward.

Roger Cushing Aiken's research in his article "Painting Manifest Destiny" notes that "[i]t would seem reasonable to suppose that this leftward movement in American migration pictures reflects or reinforces the westward historical, political, and psychological orientation of the nation during the era of Manifest Destiny."<sup>67</sup> He comes to the conclusion that the "West" is still the metaphorical compass point through which the American consciousness points and while the "West" may now be an abstract idea, it is one rooted in the physical location that once captured the hearts and minds of Americans.<sup>68</sup> Still, Aiken's ability to neatly associate the 'West' of the modern with the 'West' of the early-modern American conscious may be too neat. The leftward composition that was inherent in a majority of the cultural productions of the early-modern that constructed a rugged individualist American spirit where the institutions of power were meaningless in the advancement of society was important to an American identity that valued Manifest Destiny. Would leftward composition, i.e. a large part of this notion of the "West," really be that important to the evolving American nation of the twentieth century that switched its priority to manufacturing?.

### **The Hero, the Frontiersman**

As crucial as western movement was in appreciating the worldview of early-modern Americans, the role of settlers and frontiersmen in such movement was never forgotten. A narrative emerged that granted frontiersmen and settlers an inconceivable amount of agency in the future of America and a virile mystique that produced an individual and rugged American identity. A small part of this mystique is the widespread

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<sup>67</sup> Aikin, pg. 80.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 87.

belief that America was a “country founded by colonizers,” thereby linking America’s fabled past with settlers of the Western Frontier.<sup>69</sup> The largest part of this mystique, however, was the belief in the humanitarian and divine justification, or inherent goodness, of settlers heading West. It was often regurgitated that the purpose of settlers was to “awaken the Indian to the light of the ‘social’ arts and beliefs and the glories of order and cultivation,” according to Joel Barlow, a poet of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.<sup>70</sup> Settlers were envisioned as the advanced guard of civilization, believed to predate any military or civilization authority into the frontier.<sup>71</sup> Their actions were thought to be actions of the individual struggling against a wildland to shape the American destiny; a metaphor for the inherent goodness of ‘civilization’ conquering ‘savageness.’

The settler and frontiersman mythos was circular. Orchestrators of the American identity and bearers of some inherent goodness, the bodies of settlers and frontiersmen were also thought to be shaped by West. Part of their virility was a certain ‘healthiness’ and ‘vigor’ as a direct result of the western lands they inhabited. The Historian Conevery Bolton Valencius in his book *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* describes a phenomenon through which Americans of the nineteenth century imagined their bodies not, in a relative sense, separate entities from the world they inhabited. As people could alter the world around

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<sup>69</sup> Joel Barlow in Frederick E. Hoxie, “Retrieving the Red Continent: Settler Colonialism and the History of American Indians in the US,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 31 No. 6 (September 2008): pg. 1157.

<sup>70</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1973): pg. 342.

<sup>71</sup> Walter L. Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): pg. 114.



them through plowing, ditching, and farming, the world could, in the same vein, alter their bodies. This ‘healthiness,’ in the opinion of Joel Barlow, extended to the influence of the Native American Indians that already called the western lands their home. He states that “the [Native American] Indian awakens the white man to the undreamed-of possibilities for power and vigor. [The Native American Indian] offers not only physical strength and beauty but also a renewal of the imaginative powers of the mind.”<sup>72</sup> Both Bartlow and Valencius described an American consciousness that endowed settlers a ‘healthiness’ and vigor that was a direct result of their agency in Manifest Destiny.

Producing this vision of good, rugged, and healthy frontiersmen and settlers in the early-modern American consciousness was a perception of a visual ‘virility’ in American cultural productions of the time. Some American artists had been ascribed by the contemporary critic Charles Francis Browne “a sanity, a virility, a wholesome element in much of the home art that is lacking in that done in the Old World.”<sup>73</sup> Charles Woodbury, an American painter, described the American people as “full of life and their natural expression is force ... we are not soft—not dreamers only.”<sup>74</sup> So what exactly is virility as it relates to American visual art? Michael Preston Worley describes it as “mental health and moral purity” as well as a recognizable masculine disposition that was “distinct from European decadence and corruption.”<sup>75</sup> Within American art this virility materialized as the portrayal of settlers in a constant struggle with a harsh frontier; portraying their valiant individualism and ruggedness as the primary agent of expansion. Artists often

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> Michael Preston Worley, The 'Virile' Style in American Art,” *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 23.3 (May-June, 2016), Pg. 20.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

employed broad brushstrokes to evoke harsher scenery rather than the smooth, linear technique found in European art.<sup>76</sup> Worley argues that this “vigorous, forceful realism was a challenge to genteel, decorative, and sentimental art.”<sup>77</sup> This “forceful realism,” or virility’ found in painted works of the early-modern produced the centrality of settlers in the American consciousness that idolized them as healthy, good, and the ‘advanced guard of civilization.’

Leutze branded the mural *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* as a portrayal of a ‘peaceful conquest,’ however, his memo seems to betray that thought.

A party of migrants have arrived near sunset on the divide (watershed) from whence they have the first view of the [P]acific slope, their 'promised land' "Eldorado" having passed the troubles of the plains... Emigrant Train of wagons toiling up the slope, jolting over the mountain trail, scarcely a road, or diving into water worn gullies-upheld by the drivers from tilting over.<sup>78</sup>

Leutze uses the adjectives toil, jolt, and diving; all action words that represent, often violent, movement. He was not lying. The mural is full of struggling settlers, of jolted wagon trains, and toiling men. To the right of the family resting atop the rock formation is a group of settlers guiding the wagon train over rough terrain. The horses and oxen are depicted climbing steep hills and the wagons are portrayed in a rather violent upheaval as their wheels climb the rocks and dirt that lay before them. One settler in a green shirt employs brute strength and a lever to lift a wagon wheel from the mud. Two settlers climb a faraway rock to plant an American flag above the wagon train as if soldiers winning a battle. The one man’s hat is held high blocking the rays of sun as he gazes westward. The small scene of respite below the flag planting that is centered in the mural

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

was only possible after a journey of torment and drudgery. Still, Leutze's portrayal of the journey is not one of complete despair. Settlers toward the front, while seemingly exhausted by the droop of their cheeks and nearly empty gazes, look to the West and are illuminated by the setting sun. The struggle Leutze's depicts is one of toil, yes, but also of hope. The struggle was not meaningless, rather, it held enormous meaning. It was a justified struggle; a struggle that tested the endurance of people for the betterment of their families and for the nation as a whole.

A principal aspect of virility that was depicted in settlers of early-modern American art was that of a strong masculinity. In Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze's *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* this masculinity is evident in how Leutze depicted the gendered settlers in exceedingly disparate rolls.<sup>79</sup> The men are consistently shown in the role of the provider. Firearms are reserved solely for men. Axes as well. Two men ahead of the wagon train tirelessly swing axes at a fallen tree to clear a path and collect firewood. Their actions are vital to the survival of the wagon train and its continued journey. A man dressed in yellow and red with a feathered hat holds a falling women as they continue West. The women, on the other hand, are drawn in moments of motherhood. In a role often reserved for the comforts of a home they are shown rather helpless while the men thrive. They do not wield firearms or axes. One women in a green dress wraps her child in a blanket as she gazes into their eyes; not in a westward direction like the rest of men. Almost in a moment of doubt, of concern for the harsh wildernesses' impact on the young child and a doubt in her ability to provide. The role of women as mothers, according to Wierich, leads Leutze to depict them as "courageous but helpless

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<sup>79</sup> Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*.

when uprooted from their domestic sphere.”<sup>80</sup> A contemporary critic for the *National Intelligencer* noted that the women in the mural were showing signs of "toil and privation." Incongruous with the romanticized virility of men thriving in the westward journey, the women are not thriving but surviving. Leutze's portrayal of virility, in regards to the men of his mural, played a large role in the rugged individualist American spirit that was central to the way in which male settlers and frontiersmen were portrayed by early-modern American artists.

The way in which Leutze employed broad brushstrokes to portray the western wilderness was impressive in that it permitted the whole ballet of masculine notions of heroic struggling settlers to transpire. Broad brush strokes are expressive. They convey movement and evoke a dark, rough terrain through their uncomplicated textures but imposing nature. Examine Leutze's mountains located in the top right of the mural closely. Their details do not require much contemplation as the broad brushstrokes create uncomplicated features. Still, they give the impression that they loom over the settlers with an uneasy existence and the long and wide brushstrokes guide the viewer's eyes down towards the wagon train. The forests serve a similar purpose. The blending of the different trees together into a giant dark forest adds to the illusion that these areas are dangerous and savage. Almost untraversable in nature as the viewer cannot discern a single path but rather the feeling of danger that lies from within. The clouds, yet again, do the same. The broad brushstrokes produce the sense that each individual cloud is part of a whole that guides the viewer's eyes down towards the outstretched arms of the man in the middle of the mural. While virility is truly about the settlers and frontiersmen that are

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

centered in these artworks, the broad brushstrokes in the background are important for illustrating an uneasiness, a danger in western lands that produced part of the virile mystique of the struggling settler.

William Ranney was an American artist of the nineteenth century and is well known for his collection of paintings that were an ode to the romance and trepidations of the American West.<sup>81</sup> Like Leutze, his virile style helped construct and moderate an American identity that afforded settlers a certain masculine mystique that played a role in the construction of a uniquely early-modern American identity. In 1849 Ranney painted

one of the heroes of the

American mythos,

Daniel Boone, in a

painting titled *Boone's*

*First View of*

*Kentucky*.<sup>82</sup> The

painting depicts Boone

surrounded by five other

men and two dogs. Like

many images of western

migration, the subjects are displaced to the right of the painting, facing the left with arms outstretched.



*Boone's First View of Kentucky* by William Tylee Ranney. (Oil on canvas, 1849).

<sup>81</sup> Benjamin Genocchio, "Creating a Myth With Canvas and Paint," *New York Times*, August 3, 2007/July 20, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/03/arts/design/03rann.html>.

<sup>82</sup> William Ranney, *Boone's First View of Kentucky*, 1849, oil on canvas, Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas.

The struggle is less apparent here than in Leutze's mural but not absent. One man dressed in green and holding a firearm sits on a rock. His weight is leaned back and the rifle used as a hand rest to steady his body. Another man on the right of the painting leans on his rifle, his face tired and back slouched. Their apparel also portrays a sense of toil. Hats guard their heads against a strong summer sun, firearms protect their lives, and packs full to the brim a reminder of the absence of amenities in the western wilds. The darkness just off the cliff in front of their waiting party is a warning of the dangers of the West that lay ahead of them. Still, Daniel Boone is painted comfortable, leaning forward with no signs of fatigue towards a West that his associate points toward. His health and vigor in the presence of others that are fatigued a representation of his virility that Americans were supposed to view as heroic.

Ranney's painting *Boone's First View of Kentucky* was just as successful, if not more so, than Leutze at employing broad brushstrokes. Ranney's sky is particularly impressive in that he included the golden western sky that was an important aspect of Leutze's mural but his clouds effortlessly taper off into the sky. The details are hidden and the inherent movement of the viewers' eyes toward Boone and company occurs almost effortlessly as the broad brushstrokes seem to guide the movement of the painting. The rock behind the main actors does not promise anything in contemplation as its unicolor and nearly empty surface lack any details needed for such an activity. Rather, like the mountains in Leutze's mural, it gives an uneasy sense of looming over the party. Meant more for peripheral viewing as the details of Boone's party are so much more apparent. Ranney's use of broad brushstrokes forced the viewer's eyes to consider the virility of Boone in such a wild and dangerous wilderness.

American art of the nineteenth century celebrated the frontiersman and settlers of western migration by granting them a virile quality that established the national character. The early-modern American artistic productions that placed a great emphasis on westward movement as progress also acknowledged the human centrality of such an endeavor. A centrality that painted American men in a healthy struggle with nature through images of toil. Women were either ignored fully, as in Ranney's painting, or pigeonholed into a motherly role, as in Leutze's painting, where they were depicted out of place in the Western Frontier. Broad brushstrokes were employed to convey movement and reinforce the struggle of men through a dark, rough landscape. Americans viewing such art were implored to place it into a greater understanding of their worldview. A worldview where the West was open to be settled and 'civilized.' Where the Western Frontier was a 'healthy' land that would improve their bodies. In such a construct, the settler was portrayed as valiant on an individual level. Their crusade West was one of ruggedness where the health of them and their families would be steadily improved. On a national level, they were illustrated fulfilling the American mission. The human centrality, the notion that settlers and frontiersmen were the primary agents of societal progress of the early-modern world and were, therefore, granted a mythic virile quality, would not last into the cultural productions of the twentieth century as photography of the transcontinental railroad did not contain these virile qualities. As the machine and industry took center stage, all human agency and struggle were lost.

## The Empire of a “City Upon a Hill”

Though modernity is often connected with an increased secularization in western societies, the early-modern American identity was still heavily influenced by a religious foundation.<sup>83</sup> The belief that a divine purpose had freely guided the “discovery,” or more accurately rediscovery by Europeans, of the New World and the formation of the American people was part of a greater, evolved understanding of a world where “America has been provisionally chosen for a special destiny,” according to the historian Conrad Cherry.<sup>84</sup> This notion of a God-given land, of a national destiny tied to a Christian expansion doctrine, of an American exceptionalism was espoused by John Winthrop in the founding of the first English American colony. Before arriving in the New World, John Winthrop gave a sermon to his fellow colonists, the last line of which included the now famous quote “the lord make it like New England, for we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people upon us.”<sup>85</sup> The conviction that this new world, what would come to be known as America, would become a beacon of light for all the world to emulate continued into the nineteenth century with the notion of Manifest Destiny. Under Manifest Destiny, this “city upon a hill” would be characterized in both a humanitarian guise in the way American imagined spreading their ‘civilization’ and a divine sense in the heavenly paradise that awaited. Oftentimes, the differences were difficult to distinguish. Nevertheless, the early-modern American

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<sup>83</sup> “Ideologically speaking, nothing characterizes the Westernness of modern Western thought more profound than the acceptance by its elites of what became a fairly naturalized idea of ongoing secularization rooted in the Enlightenment.” See Vincent P. Pecora, *Secularization and Cultural Criticism: Religion, Nation, and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006): pg. 25.

<sup>84</sup> Conrad Cherry, introduction to *God’s New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed. Conrad Cherry (University of North Carolina Press, 1998): pg. 1

<sup>85</sup> John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity,” (speech, aboard the seafaring ship *Arbella* en route to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1630).



consciousness had adopted the notion of a “city upon a hill” and the god-given worldviews of earlier generations of Americans to form the basis of American expansion into the Western Wildlands where the “city upon a hill” would be spread by force.<sup>86</sup>

The underlying divinity of the American mission westward has been a favored topic of artists of the American experience. Religion in art was not unprecedented at the time for Westerners. Volumes have been written on the religious nature of art in the European Middle Ages.<sup>87</sup> Though the Renaissance may have encouraged more secular values like individualism, humanism, and a study of the natural world, many artists still produced works with an underlying religious narrative.<sup>88</sup> American artists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were students of such European art and in creating a new American style employed religion thematically in their work alongside a more secular understanding of history that assumed a connection between America's Manifest Destiny and the history of western civilization. Leutze's mural study *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* is an ideal specimen for such study due to Leutze's reliance on an ornamental border that places biblical and mythical characters alongside well-known American frontiersmen.<sup>89</sup> In that conjunction of ancient Greek heroes like Hercules splitting the passage at Gibraltar, old explorers like Christopher Columbus peering through a telescope, heroes of the American West like Daniel Boone and William Clark, and Christian holy men like Moses leading the Israelites through the desert, a

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<sup>86</sup> For more information on the connection between religion and the origins of Manifest Destiny, see Donald M. Scott, “The Religious Origins of Manifest Destiny,” Divining America, TeacherServe®, National Humanities Center, July 20, 2017. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/mandestiny.htm>.

<sup>87</sup> Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. Hugh Bredin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

<sup>88</sup> Geraldine A. Johnson, *Renaissance Art: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>89</sup> Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*.

narrative emerges that depicts the American West as part of some divine plan and part of a greater civilizing mission westward that had been started eons ago. The historian Roger Cushing Aiken insists its Leutze's belief in a "manifestation of providence" that guided Leutze's vision of a pictorial history where American frontiersmen were the fulfillment of the same divine destiny as Moses and a continuation of 'civilization' westward that began with the Greeks.<sup>90</sup> The connection with a historical and divine movement was the ideal justification for Americans to imagine their Manifest Destiny as inherently good.

Despite Leutze's employment of an ornamental border overcrowded with connections to a divine and historical mission, the actual subjects of Leutze's mural *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* hid a religious subtext.<sup>91</sup> Centered in the mural at the front of the wagon train is a family resting upon a rock. A father dressed in furs holds his wife, daughter, and newborn baby. His arm is outstretched westward, seemingly gifting an 'El Dorado' to his family. According to the historians Timothy Verdon and Filippo Rossi, as art transformed toward a more humanistic style during the Renaissance "a rediscovered interest in man necessarily included women and above all woman in the role of the mother, the physical and moral vehicle of the transmission of life."<sup>92</sup> Verdon and Rossi continue to explain the "Renaissance art's ability to blend solemnity and intimacy in images of great beauty is born of a cross between this new belief in man and the ancient faith in a Man-God, Jesus Christ the Son of Mary."<sup>93</sup> While it is true that a dramatic masculinity dominates the painting, the centered woman holding her newborn surrounded by her family reveals a solemn and intimate scene. By painting

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<sup>90</sup> Aiken, pg. 66.

<sup>91</sup> Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*.

<sup>92</sup> Timothy Verdon and Filippo Rossi, *Mary in Western Art* (Hudson Hills, 2005): pg. 203.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

the notion of motherhood so centrally, Leutze was employing Verdon and Rossi's notion of "the physical moral vehicle of the transmission of life," literally in the sense of the newborn baby and figuratively in the rejuvenation of civilization in the West. The mother and newborn baby evoke images of the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus in their innocence and destiny in a fabled land. Leutze's use of an intimate scene of motherhood to shape the core of the painting and to contrast heavily with the virile quality that dominated those around them is telling of the underlying religious mission that viewed the West as a God-given land to Americans and as a rejuvenation of 'civilization.'

If there is one painting of the American westward migration that portrays the notion of a God-given destiny as well as Leutze's mural, it is *American Progress* by John Gast.<sup>94</sup> The painting contains all the themes and styles of other paintings of the American experience. The painting moves 'west' as all the actors toil and gaze leftward on the canvas. In this instance, Gast was keen on using light and darkness to portray the transmission of the American civilization West. While many of the characters are the usual settlers, frontiersmen, and even railroad cars, at the center is an angelic woman towering over her surroundings. She is brightly lit, dressed in white, and carrying a book as she moves inexplicably westward. Behind her lies a bright landscape and ahead a dark and foreboding wilderness. The conviction that a divine force had precipitated and guided the American settlement of western lands is evident. She doesn't necessarily precede settlement, but the light that she employs to expel the darkness is a representative of the inherent goodness of the greater early-modern American divine mission and the book that accompanies her the realization of a historical mission to spread 'civilization.' Americans

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<sup>94</sup> John Gast, *American Progress*, 1872, oil on canvas, Museum of the American West, Los Angeles, California.

viewing this painting probably imagined themselves as part of the light that illuminated the darkness. As bearers of knowledge and ‘civilization. As figurative servants of this divine angelic figure.

“The city upon a hill,” or the belief that America would transform into a beacon of light for all the world to follow, that was implored of his colonists by John Winthrop in the 1600s, had been the backdrop of the American exceptionalism in the centuries to come. The conviction that a divine manifestation of prophecy had produced a unique mission for Americans to settle the West was part of the early-modern American consciousness that shaped the way Americans viewed the World. This prophecy was connected to a secular mission in the spread of ‘civilization’ to these western wildlands but also a divine mission in a godly paradise that lay waiting. Cultural productions like Leutze’s mural *Westward the Course of Empire takes Its Way* and Gast’s *American Progress* are ideal



*American Progress* by John Gast. (Oil on canvas, 1872).

representations of this early-modern belief in a divine and humanitarian manifestation of providence. Both artists painted scenes that connected America’s westward movement with a greater divine and historical movement of society that traced back eons. While modernity may promote a more secular view of the world, the early-modern era was still heavily connected to a religious underpinning. American artists of the early-modern

imagined a world inspired by a divine and humanitarian mission that produced a certain goodness in the American nation.

## **Conclusion**

The historian Roger Cushing Aiken explained that American art of the nineteenth century had been “characterized as more didactic, nationalistic, and religious and less purely art for art's sake than Old World pictures.”<sup>95</sup> This rationale explains how these artistic productions were so effective in maintaining and manufacturing the early-modern American identity in which the West played a sizable role in guiding the nation. Paintings of the early-modern constructed and moderated a Western wildland akin to an earthly paradise and the settlers who struggled toward it the orchestrators of a rugged, individualist American spirit. These paintings also sought to connect America’s Manifest Destiny with a historical and divine mission that justified western conquest as humanitarian in the way it spread civilization and godly in that it was a manifestation of some divine providence that had been passed down since the founding of the American colonies. The West’s representation in these cultural forms not only defined societal progress but moderated an American identity that spent its time, energy, and willpower in the conquest of its western lands. Leutze’s mural study and a host of other painted works from early-modern American artists employed artistic themes like a highly mobile left-to-right movement where the western lands were often illuminated in some way as paradise for settlers to consistently struggle toward, the assignment of a rugged, independent, masculine quality to settlers and frontiersmen in their interactions with a harsh frontier,

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<sup>95</sup> Aiken, pg. 68.

and the use of underlying, or sometimes unmistakable, religious and historical symbolism to justify the goodness of this societal move west. These three themes are certainly not an all-encompassing study of the early-modern American identity but they do explain how the West was being employed by eighteenth and nineteenth century American artists to imagine America in a greater historical and divine perspective. The next chapter, Chapter II, will explore all the ways that the photography of the first transcontinental railroad, in its seemingly infinite popularity and means of circulation, forced the imagined West and the American consciousness into chaos, producing a new, more modern vision for the future of America.

## Chapter II

### Manufacturing a New Reality on the Transcontinental Railroad



*East and West Shaking Hands at Laying of the Last Rail* by Andrew J. Russell. May 10, 1869.

On May 10, 1869 the locomotives *Engine No. 119* from the Union Pacific and the *Jupiter* from the Central Pacific met opposite one another in Promontory Summit, Utah to celebrate the realization of the first American transcontinental railroad.<sup>96</sup> It was a sunny day, 69 degrees Fahrenheit with a slight breeze as the *San Francisco Newsletter* proclaimed “Today a mighty people, within the borders of whose land the ceaseless clank of engines and the ring of the anvil are mellowed into music by the song of the husbandman... pauses in the midst of its activity, and centers its eyes on a barren spot in the midst of the Great Desert.”<sup>97</sup> Representing the beautiful style and workmanship of the Victorian Age, the two locomotives were posed resolutely atop their tracks when Andrew J. Russell captured their grandiose nature with one of the most memorable photographs of the era.<sup>98</sup> *East and the West Shaking Hands at the Joining of the Rails*, as the photograph came to be titled by Russell, depicted the heads of the two locomotives feet from one another on the same track- towering over their surroundings—running off opposite ends of the photograph as if producing a bridge to their respective coasts.<sup>99</sup> The nearby people were ensnared in a moment of excitement and joy that not only cascaded through the attendees but gripped the entire nation. At the center of the photograph were two men shaking hands. Just as a sign hung in Sacramento, California, years earlier at the

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<sup>96</sup> For a full account see Gillian Houghton, *The Transcontinental Railroad: A Primary Source History of America's First Coast-To-Coast Railroad* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2002), pg. 46-49. William G. Thomas, *The Iron Way: Railroads, the Civil War, and the Making of Modern America* (London: Yale University Press, 2002), pg. 206. Etc.

<sup>97</sup> “The Transcontinental Railroad Postscript,” *San Francisco newsletter and California Advertiser* Vol. IX, No. XV (San Francisco, California), May 15, 1869. And for more information about the day of the joining of the rails see J.N. Bowman, “Driving the Last Spike At Promontory, 1869,” *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 2 (June 1957): pg. 96-106.

<sup>98</sup> Roy E. Appleman, “Union Pacific Locomotive #119 and Central Pacific Locomotive #60, Jupiter at Promontory Summit, Utah, May 10, 1869” (Washington Office, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, July, 1966).

<sup>99</sup> Andrew J. Russell, *East and West Shaking Hands at Laying Last Rail*. 1869. Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, California. <http://collections.museumca.org/?q=collection-item/h694592030>



groundbreaking ceremony for the tracks of the Central Pacific Railroad Company proclaiming “May the Bond be Eternal,” their handshake was not only a sign that the east and west coasts of the United States were finally united by rail but also a commentary on an end to the calamity of the Civil War and a desire for these tracks to be a prosperous overland trade route that connected Europe to Asia.<sup>100</sup>

Russell was born in 1829 in Nunda, New York, where he apprenticed with a local artisan and lived the life of a painter often employed by local businessmen and politicians for portraits and landscapes. At the outbreak of the Civil War he joined the United States Army and painted a diorama of the war effort to encourage recruitment. Soon after, he was appointed the official government photographer for the Union Army and spent his days chronicling the war effort.<sup>101</sup> At least one photograph exists of Russell in his Union Army uniform. He is tall and stout with precisely combed hair and a flowing beard.<sup>102</sup> Three years after the war ended Russell was commissioned by the Union Pacific to photograph the construction of their spur of the transcontinental railroad. Further west, Russell’s peer Alfred A. Hart was diligently photographing the Central Pacific’s progress through the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Unlike Russell, Hart’s life is shrouded in mystery.<sup>103</sup> The only photograph of him that remains widely available is of an old man

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<sup>100</sup> *Pacific Railroad Inauguration: From Sacramento Daily Union, January 9th, 1863. The First Rail Laid, from Sacramento Daily Union, October 27th, 1863. Progress of Work* (California State Library, 1863), pg. 3 and 36.

<sup>101</sup> Andrew J. Russell seems to be more popular for his Civil War photography, at least in the historical record, than his Pacific Railroad photography. See Susan E. Williams, “‘Richmond Again Taken’. Reappraising the Brady Legend through Photographs by Andrew J. Russell,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. 110 No. 4 (2002): pg. 437-460. Josephine Cobb, “Photographers of the Civil War,” *Military Affairs* Vol.26, No. 3 Civil War Issue (Autumn, 1962): pg. 127-135. .

<sup>102</sup> *Capt. Andrew J. Russell, stands atop the steps. Photographer and mentor, Egbert G. Fowx, leans against the pillar n.d.* [http://www.luminous-lint.com/app/photographer/A\\_J\\_\\_Russell/A/](http://www.luminous-lint.com/app/photographer/A_J__Russell/A/).

<sup>103</sup> Peter E. Palmquist, “The Heart of Alfred A. Hart: A Review of Recent Research,” *Stereo World* Vol. 12, No. 3 (Jul./Aug. 1985): pg. 38-39.

with grey hair and a balding head. The youthful swagger that he once must have had is all but gone.<sup>104</sup> Both Hart and Russell were instrumental in photographing the construction of the first American transcontinental railroad and together their collections of photographs produced a new image of the Western frontier that was disparate from that of the painted works of the early-modern.

The photograph *East and the West Shaking Hands at the Joining of the Rails* that memorialized the completion of America's first transcontinental railroad was one of nearly a thousand photographs taken of its construction by Andrew J. Russell and Alfred A. Hart. These photographs were widely disseminated to the American populace in the form of stereographs, published in newspapers, hung in frames, and further immortalized in travel guides, corporate advertisements, lithographs, and lantern slides where they became tools for discussion and lectures on the American West.<sup>105</sup> An article written for the Yale University Library about Russell's photographic collection compares their distribution and sense of awe with that of the images taken by the Hubble Telescope in the space age; a fitting comparison as they were both highly advanced machines for their respective eras.<sup>106</sup> While Russell's photograph of the joining of the rails may have survived as an icon of the construction of the first transcontinental railroad, it was not the

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<sup>104</sup> Alfred A. Hart, *Alfred A. Hart* in Peter E. Palmquist, "The Heart of Alfred A. Hart: A Review of Recent Research," *Stereo World* Vol. 12, No. 3 (Jul./Aug. 1985): pg. 38-39.

<sup>105</sup> Stereographs were the first form of mass-entertainment and widely popular. See Albert E. Osborne, *The stereograph and the Stereoscope, with Special Maps and Books Forming a Travel System: What They Mean for Individual Development, what they Promise for the Spread of Civilization* (New York: Underwood & Underwood, 1909). Also, Nardo, *The Golden Spike*, "Chapter 4: A Changing Country." A.J. Russell's photographs were published in a book and he was given authorial credit. Andrew. J. Russell, *The Great West Illustrated in a Series of Photographic Views Across the Continent Taken Along the Line of the Union Pacific Railroad, West from Omaha, Nebraska : with an Annotated table of contents, giving a brief description of each view, its peculiarities, characteristics, and Connection with the Different Points on the Road* (New York: Union Pacific, 1869).

<sup>106</sup> Construction of the Union Pacific, *Yale University Library*, Assessed April 11, 2017. <http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/collections/highlights/construction-union-pacific-railroad>

only image available to those experiencing the joy and excitement of its completion in 1869. The photographic collections of Alfred A. Hart and Andrew J. Russell of the construction of the first transcontinental railroad, due in part by their wide dispersal and popularity, played a large role in constructing and moderating an American identity that was disparate from the one presented in the painted works of the early-modern. The form, function, and style of these photographs did not lend themselves to picturesque westward journeys through both the vastness space and time, the production of rugged individualism, or some divine and humanitarian notion of conquest. Rather, as this chapter will argue, these photographs presented an American identity that lauded the importance of the power structures of capitalism and the machine world it begot as paramount to societal advancement.<sup>107</sup>

The notion that the author of a collection of photographs (not necessarily the author of the photographs themselves) was capable of producing a unique narrative and emotional response that could alter the way people imagined a topic was a fundamental development used extensively by the Union and Central Pacific as they disseminated the photographs taken by Alfred A. Hart and Andrew J. Russell. The tactic was only pioneered a few years earlier in the Civil War with the photographic collection of Mathew B. Brady. Alan Trachtenberg's article "Albums of War" argues that the historical debates surrounding Brady were too preoccupied with questions of which photographs Brady actually authored that they missed the importance of the collection as

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<sup>107</sup> A special thanks to the Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum and the Oakland Museum of California for their wonderfully organized online archives of photographs relating to this project. Their dedication to making these photographs available and accessible has been a great help.

a whole.<sup>108</sup> Brady told a story through his published collection, a narrative in the way he chose exactly what was to be portrayed and in what order that guided the imagination of the viewer. Brady had transformed himself from a simple documentarian to a storyteller; a wayward cultural producer. In 1912, the historian Francis Trevelyan Miller wrote a book titled *Photographic History of the Civil War* where he argued that “these time-stained photographs” were a permanent and unquestionable set of facts in a passionately contested war.<sup>109</sup> In spite of the way many history textbooks portray photography, we know this statement to be erroneous. Trachtenberg understood that Brady’s collection of photographs produced a narrative that did not raise the topic of slavery or of human rights for black Americans but rather of a unifying event for the Anglo-Saxon race; the “American War of the Roses.”<sup>110</sup> Trachtenberg further argued that this unique archival and editorial narrative had never before achieved such far-reaching cultural implications. The ease with which photography was produced relative to paintings in both effort and time, the sizable amount of photographs being assembled during the war, the view of photography as a form of communication rather than art, and the widespread employment of the stereograph machine by average Americans led the *New York Times*, in the height of the Civil War, to recognize Brady for being “the first to make photography the Clio of the war.”<sup>111</sup> Photography was particularly suited for such narrative storytelling and these

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<sup>108</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, “Albums of War: On Reading Civil War Photographs,” *Representations*, No. 9, Special Issue: *American Culture Between the Civil War and World War I* (Winter, 1985), pp. 1-32.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid; Francis Trevelyan Miller, *Photographic History of the Civil War* (New York: Review of Reviewers Company, 1912).

<sup>110</sup> Trachtenberg, pg. 2.

<sup>111</sup> Trachtenberg argues that these photographs came to be seen as communication as well as arguing the vast adaptation of the stereograph machine in the average household. Ibid, pg. 3-5. Alan Trachtenberg, “Brady’s Portraits,” *Yale Review* 73 (Winter 1984), 230-53.

techniques were repeated only a few years later by the capitalists of the Union and Central Pacific Railroad Companies in the American West.<sup>112</sup>

Not only did photography permit a finely crafted narrative to enter the imagination of Americans through its ease of use and wide dispersal, a great tool for the capitalists of the nation as they owned the media, but the ‘immediacy’ of photography was an important tool for crafting a modern identity. Where the form of painting was employed by early-modern American artists to produce an explosion of spacetime, i.e. the portrayal of a journey in many temporal and spacial locations on a single canvas, Philip McCouat argued that the speed of photography produced an immediacy that fragmented time.<sup>113</sup> Paintings were meant to be finite; to contain within them a completeness in message. Photography, then, was fleeting. It captured moments in time that the human eye could never perceive permitting people to explore the minute details of movement hidden in the blurs of shifting objects. The mechanics of movement, in machines as in creatures, were explored scientifically and objectively.<sup>114</sup> Where early-modern painted works imagined Americans as part of the grand flow of events through time and space, photography imagined humans as mechanical beings. Photography explored the connections between machine and man to depict the importance of machinery in everyday life.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Trachtenberg, “Albums of War,” pg. 3-5.

<sup>113</sup> For my explanation of the explosion of spacetime in early-modern painted works see Chapter I of this thesis. Philip McCouat, “Art in a Speeded up World,” *Journal of Art in Society*, [www.artinsociety.com](http://www.artinsociety.com)

<sup>114</sup> One example Philip McCouat provides is that of a trotting horse. Photography, to the surprise of many, revealed that horses, at a single point during their strides, have all four legs off the ground. The mechanics of the horses movement were laid bare for all to see and altered the way in which people imagined horses to move. Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> The surrealist art of the early twentieth century was a direct response to the mechanical and immediate nature of photography. Take, for instance, Rene Magritte's painting *Time Transfixed* (1938). The way in which the locomotive propels itself through a blocked fireplace; tiny in stature

Photography in general and the photographs of the construction of the transcontinental railroad in particular played a large role in dismantling the tenants of the early-modern American identity. Chapter I established that the form, function, and style of early-modern American painted works constructed and moderated an American identity that imagined society as moving through both space and time in a westward direction, awarded frontiersmen and settlers a heroic virile quality as the controlling agents of America's future, ignored the role of institutions like the government or military in expansion, and justified such expansion in both divine and humanitarian terms. The sections of this chapter, Chapter II, will assess the ways in which the form, function, and style of photography divorced notions of progress from any societal movement, lauded the machine as an agent of progress while ignoring the authority of labor in its construction and operation, highlighted the role of institutions of power like capitalism and the government, and produced particular roles for Native American Indians and Chinese laborers disparate from their role in the early-modern as recipients of 'civilization.' In dismantling the worldview of early-modern Americans these photographs were a sizable part of a greater cultural transformation that imagined a new world, modern in nature, that relied on the institutions of capitalism and industrial development to define progress.

### **A Motionless Space**

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but exerting its steam engine in the rather bening and comforting space of the traditional living room is unnerving. The clock on the mantle reads twelve forty five but the deep shadows reveal a much later time. The intrusion of machinery into a space it did not belong and the confusing sense of a fragmented time create a surrealist approach that was a direct response to the new form of photography. Ibid.

A closer examination of the photograph *East and the West Shaking Hands at the Joining of the Rails* by Andrew J. Russell reveals an insightful theme amid the photographs of the first transcontinental railroad.<sup>116</sup> Antithetical to much of the American art of the nineteenth century, these photographs do not employ a leftward composition.<sup>117</sup> *East and the West Shaking Hands at the Joining of the Rails* offers viewers a narrative of consolidation; of a newly formed bond both literally and figuratively. In a greater figurative sense, Russell portrayed the railroad track and locomotives that continue off each end of the photograph into the distance as a metaphorical bridge between the east and west coasts of the nation. On a smaller scale, the tracks signaled the literal opening up of lines of communication, trade, and travel between the industrial heart of the nation and its outer territories. Further producing the symbolism of consolidation is the two men at the center shaking hands as others surround them in a celebratory fashion. The men of the photograph do not convey motion, as they are not in the process of advancing, nor are they even merely glancing toward a new setting. Their eyes are fixed on the camera. Whereas many paintings and murals of the nineteenth century portray their subjects in a perpetual struggle as they advanced toward the West, such as Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze's mural *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* was shown to do in Chapter I, Russell's photograph reveals a relatively motionless celebration.<sup>118</sup> One where Americans were fixated on where they were, their future not held in some fantastical westward land.

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<sup>116</sup> Russell, *East and West Shaking Hands at Laying Last Rail*.

<sup>117</sup> Chapter I explained that leftward composition was the notion that if you placed a compass flat upon a canvas or mural you would find that American cultural productions of the nineteenth century often guided the viewer's eye from right-to-left, or 'west' on a compass. See Roger Cushing Aiken, "Paintings of Manifest Destiny: Mapping the Nation," *American Art* Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn, 2000): pg. 78-89.

<sup>118</sup> Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze's mural study on the U.S. Capitol Building *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* was reasoned in Chapter I to contain a leftward composition in the way it depicted the beginning of a wagon train on the right side of the mural, its progress in the middle,

The absence of westward movement in the photography of the first American transcontinental railroad is a momentous adjustment in the thematic styles of American art. It is not only reasonable to conclude but indeed likely that the material world surrounding its construction led to this dissimilarity in thematic style. While the early-modern American consciousness often viewed the world in a strict east-to-west paradigm where the meeting place between so-called ‘civilization’ in the east and ‘savagery’ in the west was the advancing line of Euro-American settlement, Andrew J. Russell’s photograph *East and the West Shaking Hands at the Joining of the Rails* is the most distinct evidence that the construction of the transcontinental railroad never clearly fit into this paradigm.<sup>119</sup> Fundamental to the Pacific Railway Act of 1862, which authorized the construction of the transcontinental railroad, was the strategy of two competing railroad companies, the Central and Union Pacific in particular, commencing separate construction projects from either end of the nation and, ultimately, connecting into a single track.<sup>120</sup> From its inception the Pacific Railway Act did not seek to encourage the locomotive as an agent of the expansion of American ‘civilization’ along a western trajectory, rather it sought to connect two busy American localities separated by arduous terrain.

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and a virgin wilderness on its left. Not only did the viewer’s eyes move right-to-left but the subjects also moved through time as Leutze sought to depict a pictorial history of American western migration. For more information see Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*. Also, Aiken, “Paintings of Manifest Destiny: Mapping the Nation.” Also, Jochen Wierich “Struggling Through History: Emanuel Leutze, Hegel, and Empire,” *American Art, Volume 15, Number 2* (Summer, 2001), pp. 52-71. Also, this theory explained thoroughly with evidence in Chapter I of this thesis.

<sup>119</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, an American historian at the turn of the twentieth century, asserts “in this advance, the frontier is the outer edge of the wave -- the meeting point between savagery and civilization.” See Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (presentation, World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, Illinois, 1893). Also, see the “Introduction” and “Chapter I” to this thesis for more information.

<sup>120</sup> Pacific Railway Act, July 1, 1862; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1996; Record Group 11; General Records of the United States Government; National Archives.



Alfred A. Hart and Andrew J. Russell created a directionally chaotic collection of photographs of the construction of the transcontinental railroad that supported the conciliatory tone established by the material conditions of its production. Crucial to this chaos was the absence of the numerous styles and symbols employed by early-modern artists to construct and moderate an identity founded on westward expansion. One of Andrew J. Russell's many photographs taken on the flatlands of Wyoming is a great example of this phenomenon due to its bare leftward composition. *Wyoming Station, Engine No. 23 on Main Track* revealed tracks that ran on a horizontal plane from one side of the image to the other and a locomotive, labeled as *No. 23*, which sat sternly atop the tracks with its antler adorned headlight facing left.<sup>121</sup> An eerie connection, not necessarily on purpose, to the oxen and other animals that use to drive expansion west alongside settlers in early-modern painted works. A compact building, clearly a type of railroad station, sits just to the right framing the right side of the photograph as busy and safe. On the surface it would seem that the leftward composition is clear in that the railroad tracks produce an east-west imagery and the locomotive's direction a westward trajectory.

The underlying imagery of the photograph, however, produced a much different narrative. *Wyoming Station, Engine No. 23 on Main Track* discloses a scene where the locomotive and people are indifferent; they do not struggle in any



*Wyoming Station, Engine No. 23 on Main Track* by Andrew J. Russell. 1868.

<sup>121</sup> Andrew J. Russell, *Wyoming Station, Engine No. 23 on Main Track*. 1868, Glass Plate Negative, Oakland Museum of California. <http://collections.museumca.org/?q=collection-item/h694591894>.

noteworthy manner. The people's bodies are positioned upright with their weight on their heels giving the impression that they are leaning on the locomotive that rests behind them. The locomotive does not exude steam and the wheels are not blurred under some kind of movement. The people do not toil, nor do they even merely gaze or outstretch their arms. The actors of the photograph are portrayed stationary and comfortable, a discernibly different role than the actors of early-modern painted works who were depicted with a sense of urgency and gall. Moreover, the photograph does not highlight any western lands on its left. Where painted works of the early-modern portrayed western lands with hues of gold, illuminated landscapes, or vast green prairies, Russell's photograph does nothing of the sort. Rather, leaving no room between the locomotive and the end of the image. The people's eyes don't gaze, illuminated toward leftward lands nor do they gift an "El Dorado" to their children with outstretched arms, their attention sternly focused toward the camera, worried not about struggle nor westward conquest but the machine that sits in front of them. The symbolism that constructed and moderated a western narrative in early-modern painted works was absent from this photograph.

As the transcontinental railroad became a staple in the imagination of Americans and Americans were inundated with its photographs escaping the West, the tone surrounding the Western Frontier began to change. Whereas Americans once described America's progress into the frontier with phrases like "a struggling world for three centuries" or "already the advance guard of the irresistible army of the Anglo-Saxon emigration has begun to pour down upon [the Western frontier]," the completion of the transcontinental railroad evoked a much more conciliatory and profit-hungry tone.<sup>122</sup> *The*

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<sup>122</sup> John O'Sullivan, "Annexation;" Wierich, "Struggling Through History: Emanuel Leutze, Hegel, and Empire," pg. 66.

*Salt Lake Daily Telegraph* described its completion as “the inhabitants of the Atlantic seaboard and the dwellers on the Pacific slopes are no longer separated as distinct peoples—they are henceforth members of the same great family—united by great principles and general interests.”<sup>123</sup> Speaking at the completion ceremony, Governor Leland Stanford remarked “this line of rails connecting the Atlantic and Pacific, and affording to commerce a new transit, will prove, we trust, the speedy forerunner of increased facilities.”<sup>124</sup> The perception of a line of Euro-American settlement pushing further and further west that was paramount to the early-modern American consciousness ceased to exist during the construction of the transcontinental railroad as American artists imagined their West as the setting for capitalism’s expansion. A more conciliatory and profit driven narrative pervaded the consciousness that viewed these photographs.

Chapter I established the importance of leftward composition in the cultural productions of the early-modern as it had imagined America, and greater western civilization, heading inextricably westward in its pursuit of progress. The photographic collections of the first American transcontinental railroad by Andrew J. Russell and Alfred A. Hart defied the theory of an American western trajectory by producing a directionally chaotic group of photographs that did not present the West as the future of America. In 1839 John O’Sullivan wrote an article for *The United States Democratic Review* where he described the future of American greatness in spatial as well as temporal terms; “the far-reaching, the boundless future will be the era of American greatness. In its magnificent domain of space and time, the nation of many nations is

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<sup>123</sup> “The Pacific R.R. Finished,” *Salt Lake Telegram and Commercial Advertiser*, May 11, 1869.

<sup>124</sup> Pacific Railway Act, July 1, 1862; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1996; Record Group 11; General Records of the United States Government; National Archives.

destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles...”<sup>125</sup> After the construction of the transcontinental railroad when the photographs of Hart and Russell had reached a mass American audience the narrative had changed. Space was no longer important in defining progress as the locomotive now traversed such space with ease; both space and time were condensed in the era of the locomotive. The camera, a machine unto itself, portrayed the destruction of this spacetime superbly.<sup>126</sup> These photographs imagined a world devoid of the early-modern spatial and temporal attributes that came to define progress in early American cultural productions. Rather, in the machinery of the modern world, the locomotive now commanded the role of bearer of progress in visual productions.

### **Mechanized Progress**

As the roar of the locomotive’s engine penetrated the canyon walls of the Sierra Nevadas and spewed smoke into the crisp air of the Rocky Mountains the camera captured a novel juxtaposition of machine and nature in a region once imagined by Americans to be defined by its virgin wildlands and brave settlers. Chapter I established an early-modern American culture that imagined settlers and frontiersman as the free agents in control of progress, measured by their literal westward progression against a ‘savage’ line in the frontier. This conflict between so-called ‘civilization’ and ‘savagery’ was linked to notions of freedom and self-sufficiency where husbandmen would avoid

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<sup>125</sup> John O’Sullivan, "The Great Nation of Futurity," *The United States Democratic Review*, Volume 6, Issue 23, pp. 426-430.

<sup>126</sup> It was established above that photography was great at freezing time and space to produce immediacy. The same immediacy that the locomotive produced in the way it made travel through time and space more efficiently.

the subservience and venality of a class of factory workers, according to eighteenth and early nineteenth intellectuals like the American President Thomas Jefferson.<sup>127</sup> Still, Leo Marx notes in his book *The Machine in the Garden* that pastoral idealism had provided a clear sanction for conquest of the wilderness, for improving upon raw nature and for economic and technological development- up to a point.”<sup>128</sup> Americans desire to have it ‘both ways,’ as explained by Marx as art and nature or, more clearly, a ‘society of the middle landscape where the machine was employed by the husbandman,’ led to a crisis of consciousness in that no one living through such a development could identify the point at which technological and economic development should stop; the brink where the factory system had replaced the farm on a cultural level in the minds and habits of the average American.<sup>129</sup> In such a sweeping cultural transformation of the American consciousness the juxtaposition of the locomotive in the Western wildlands through the photographs of Andrew J. Russell and Alfred A. Hart imagined the locomotives’ new position as the controlling agent in charge of progress replacing the settler and frontiersman. The West was now characterized in visual cultural productions by the machine rather than the progress of settlers toward some imaginary ‘savage’ line. The machine came to be seen as an incontrovertible force of change that did not spoil the wilderness but rather made it more accessible.

The original contradiction of the machine and virgin wilderness that makes the acceptance of these photographs so meaningful stems from the machines changing role in

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<sup>127</sup> The American President Thomas Jefferson was known for his excessive critique of the manufacturing society that had taken hold in Europe. He and many others imagined the ‘West’ , i.e. America, to be free from such blight. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, “Chapter 19,” (Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1787).

<sup>128</sup> Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, pg. 226.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

society. Where once American intellectuals like Thomas Jefferson proposed a society in which machines were to be employed as tools for husbandman, the role of the machine in Europe, i.e. as part of the factory system that came to dominate the lives of the average European, eventually came to America.<sup>130</sup> As the nineteenth century was nearing its end, the machine in America represented, as quoted from the eighteenth century poet Thomas Carlyle who witnessed this transformation a century earlier in Europe, “a change in our whole way of life ... because ‘the same habits regulate not our modes of action alone, but our modes of thought and feeling. Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand.’”<sup>131</sup> Where once men had wielded the machine, now, in the modern manufacturing society that had erupted in America, machines wielded the men. The machine was no longer the hardware Americans brandished in the pursuit of efficiency but the software through which their lives were programmed. Proving to be not only a major cause of this transformation but also to perfectly embody its spirit, the locomotive propelled itself into the daily lives of Americans by revolutionizing “business opportunities, social relationships, and the physical landscape around them.”<sup>132</sup> The locomotive, then, positioned among the vast terrain of the Western Frontier represented the changing role of the machine in the American consciousness and portrayed the march of modernity into a land once held sacred in the early-modern.

As Alfred A. Hart embarked on his journey east of San Francisco to photograph the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad he was not inundated with notions of the new influences of the machine on the American consciousness. Still, the power of the

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<sup>130</sup> Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

<sup>131</sup> Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, pg. 174.

<sup>132</sup> William G. Thomas, *The Iron Way: Railroads, the Civil War, and the Making of Modern America* (London: Yale University press, 2011), pg. 2.

machine to alter reality, to be the foundation of progress, was an important enough influence on Hart when he ordered the engineer to halt the Central Pacific's signature locomotive, the *C.P. Huntington*, high above the valley at Cape Horn, California.<sup>133</sup> The *C.P. Huntington* was constructed in Paterson, New Jersey where it was packed on a boat destined for the Central Pacific Railroad Company in California. As modern as the *C.P. Huntington* was, it still retained an irresistible Victorian style, an imposing stature, and an unmistakable red and black paint job; even if the black and white photography of the era did not do it justice.<sup>134</sup> Hart positioned the *C.P. Huntington* on its track high above the valley at Cape Horn and stationed his camera to perfectly capture the juxtaposition of this machine forged in an industrial city of the East and the vastness of nature in the West, thereby interpreting the West not through its virgin wilderness but instead by its accessibility as a consequence of the machine.



#44 by Alfred A. Hart.

Hart situated his camera to the side of the locomotive with the whole of the wilderness of Cape Horn visible as a backdrop.<sup>135</sup> The locomotive takes up a disproportionately large amount of real estate in the photograph and its dark steel a constant reminder of its

<sup>133</sup> For more information on the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad through Cape Horn, California see Edson T. Strobridge, "The Central Pacific Railroad and the Legend of Cape Horn 1865-1866," *Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum*. Published 2001/Accessed April 12, 2017, [http://cprr.org/Museum/Cape\\_Horn.html](http://cprr.org/Museum/Cape_Horn.html)

<sup>134</sup> D.L. Joslyn, "The Life Story of the Locomotive C.P. Huntington As Told By Itself," *The Railway Locomotive Historical Society Bulletin* No. 61 (May, 1943): pg. 10-34.

<sup>135</sup> Alfred A. Hart, #044. Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum.[http://cprr.org/Museum/Photo-Gallery/\\_hart\\_044-0a\\_detail.html](http://cprr.org/Museum/Photo-Gallery/_hart_044-0a_detail.html)

alienness. Imposing trees realized as mere pinpricks, dotting the green hills alongside the ravine lay just beyond. The name written on the side of the locomotive, the one given to it by the Central Pacific, the *C.P. Huntington*, is clear for the viewer to see. Yet, the cabin and the engineer are obscured by darkness. If the crew remained inside, as it is impossible to tell, care was obviously not taken to include them in the picture. The locomotive was the object of interest, its name clear and the crew unimportant. The second photograph taken atop the locomotive is similar in intent and subject.<sup>136</sup> The landscape is present but has a much smaller role in the photograph. Rather, highlighted are the tracks on which the locomotive would travel, not the landscape that lay to its side. The chimney of the locomotive dominates the picture as steam billows out, blocking much of the path ahead. Other parts of the locomotive are featured prominently; including the bell. Hart portrayed the locomotive among the magnificent hills of Cape Horn in intricate detail and as a result the locomotive defined the wilderness that surrounded it.

The photographic collection of Andrew J. Russell is similar to Hart's in that he depicts the locomotive as a crucial part of man's foray into the frontier. In one photograph, three locomotives positioned partially outside a roundhouse in Rawlins Springs, Wyoming lie empty, seemingly in a perpetual state of waiting.<sup>137</sup> The story of the town's creation began with the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, General Rawlins, who was tasked with protecting the crew surveying the route for the Pacific

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<sup>136</sup> Alfred A. Hart, #056 [http://cpr.org/Museum/Photo-Gallery/\\_hart\\_056.html](http://cpr.org/Museum/Photo-Gallery/_hart_056.html).

<sup>137</sup> Andrew J. Russell, *Rawlings Springs* xx#150. 1869. Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, California. <http://collections.museumca.org/?q=collection-item/h69459441>



Railroad from Native American Indian attacks.<sup>138</sup> While traveling through Wyoming the general wanted a drink of good, cold water and his troops found a great spring. The general declared "If anything is ever named after me, I hope it will be a spring of water."<sup>139</sup> And so it was. Currently, Rawlins Spring is a refueling point for Union Pacific trains and must have served a similar function in the past judging by the infrastructure in the photograph. Russell may have been riveted by such infrastructure for locomotives so far into the frontier as one of the reasons he set up his camera and snapped a photograph.

The photograph is peculiar as it has a discernible dissimilarity from all other photographs in Russell's and Hart's collection. It lacks of monolithic landscapes, the majestic mountains, hilly valleys, boundless grasslands, expansive deserts, or any number of other terrains found along the transcontinental railroad route that would have made it a recognizable picture. Russell made it arduous for the viewer to surmise a location or time period without extraneous information. This was not a mistake.

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<sup>138</sup> For an example of the ongoing war with the Native Americans in the area see "The Indians: Utes on the War-Path-Cheyenne and Arapaho Depredation- Red Cloud gathering His Tribes," New York Times (New York, NY), July 7, 1870.

<sup>139</sup> The story of the founding of Rawlins, Wyoming can be found on the town's website. "History of Rawlins," *Rawlins, Wyoming*. Accessed April 12, 2017. <http://www.rawlins-wyoming.com/index.aspx?NID=191>



*Rawlings Springs* by Andrew J. Russell. 1869.

The three locomotives that feature prominently in the photograph, labeled 106, 156, and 96 respectively, are framed to hold a vastly disproportionate amount of space in the image, with the remaining a mere stone wall with wooden doors hiding three tunnels. The heads of the locomotives jet out of the tunnels with a commanding presence, evoking the imagination of the viewer. The locomotives look as if they are horses at the starting line of a race gazing at the landscapes that lie waiting. The illusion is completed by the

position of the camera off to the side and peering up as if the viewer was a young child staring longingly at a dream. Like fire engines waiting at a firehouse for the call to jump into action. The sense that this place was merely a way station, a rest stop before the locomotives continued on is evident. While the potential energy of the locomotives resembles that struggle of the settlers westward in the art of the early-modern, the lack of directional support truly separates it. The locomotives' conquest did not fit into a neat east-west paradigm of the early-modern but rather the more modern conception of the spread of industrial capitalism to every inch of the world.

As the Union Pacific line built west from Rawlin Springs and neared its end in Utah, Russell stopped one of its locomotives alongside the Green River in the dead of winter. Russell must have been cold as he climbed a nearby hill to position his camera in front and to the side of the locomotive.<sup>140</sup> The deep black locomotive contrasted with the white splendor of the icy Green River and its snow-filled banks paints the locomotive as a dominant and foreign figure. Aiding in its visibility is its position in the center of the photograph, the obvious object of Russell's interest, as well as its distance from the camera, giving the illusion of grandeur. The minute details of the locomotive are clear. The cow catcher,



*Green River, Side Cut with Engine*  
by Andrew J. Russell. 1869.

driving wheel, smoke-stack, light, and other aspects of it are completely in focus while

<sup>140</sup> Andrew J. Russell, *Green River, Side Cut with Engine*, 1869, Glass Plate Negative, Oakland Museum of California. <http://collections.museumca.org/?q=collection-item/h69459453>

the person hanging from the cab is blurry and the snowy landscape has nearly no characteristics as the small details are lost. It is apparent that Russell imagined a fascinating dichotomy between the locomotive and nature in the organization of this photograph. The juxtaposition of the biting cold and locomotive portrayed the locomotive as safe and warm, especially in a place where settlers may have faced severe danger in years prior.

The locomotive constituted an important new technology of the industrial age, yet, it is in its juxtaposition with the wild landscapes of America's Western Frontier in the photographs of the construction of the transcontinental railroad that it was truly fortified in the American identity as an emissary of progress and an agent of incontrovertible change. As Hart photographed the *C.P. Huntington* high above the valley at Cape Horn and Russell photographed various locomotives among a roundhouse in Rawlin Springs and along the Green River in Utah, the West was being reshaped by the success of the machine in the wilderness. Its powerful but alien body a constant reminder to the viewer of the safety that the industrial world provided so far into a once dangerous frontier. When the historian William G. Thomas argued that the locomotive was the most visible indicator of modernity, he had based that definition on its role in the Civil War. However, the photography escaping the West performed just as important of a role in the locomotives' ascendancy to such an important position in modernity.<sup>141</sup> The human centrality of the early-modern where settlers and frontiersmen spread out toward some kind of "savage" line was no more. Instead, Americans were inundated with photography that had positioned the locomotive in that role. Americans were forced to view the West

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<sup>141</sup> Thomas, pg. 5.

not in terms of settlement but instead of certain accessibilities as a product of the machine. A modern American consciousness was born that did not heroicize settlers but rather valued the machinery of capitalism.

### **The Spectre of Labor**

The narrative surrounding the construction of the transcontinental railroad emphasized the role of the ‘Big Four’ in securing the legislation, monetary funds, and direction that was vital for a successful project. The ‘Big Four’ was comprised of Leland Stanford, Collis Potter Huntington, Mark Hopkins, and Charles Crocker who were influential California businessmen, philanthropists, and railroad tycoons. Whole histories have been written devoted to lionizing their role in Central Pacific Railroad Company.<sup>142</sup> “The [first transcontinental] railroad was built- built, as opposed to dreamed of and talked about—by men who cared only about money and were absolutely ruthless about money. The lust for riches propelled the railroad over the mountains, through the deserts, across the plains,” expressed the historian Richard Raynor in his book *The Associates: Four Capitalists Who Created California*.<sup>143</sup> He continues “the Big Four, or more pleasingly, the Associates, a name with something simultaneously secret, powerful, and sinister about it... saw the opportunity others spurned [referring to first the transcontinental railroad], seized that opportunity, controlled it, rode it to unruly fulfillment, then maintained and maximized it over decades with a subtlety and stamina that boggle the

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<sup>142</sup> Oscar Lewis, *The Big Four: The Story of Huntington, Stanford, Hopkins, and Crocker, and of the Building of the Central Pacific* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012); Alton Pryor, *The Big Four Railroad Barons and Other Railroad Stories* (Createspace Independent Publishing, 2014); Richard Rayner, *The Associates: Four Capitalists Who Created California* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009); etc.

<sup>143</sup> Raynor, *The Associates: Four Capitalists Who created California*, pg. 14-15.

mind.”<sup>144</sup> Raynor concluded “the building of the railroad, the creation of the state, and the invention of big business as we now understand it were merely the necessary by-products of a process by which these four men became as fabulously wealthy as anybody in American history.”<sup>145</sup>

Raynor certainly lionized the Big Four by characterizing them as determined- according to Raynor a determination that included wickedness- civilized in their pursuit of progress, and aggressive in the methods through which they gained prosperity.<sup>146</sup> Americans contemporary to the building of the transcontinental railroad may not have glorified the Big Four as much as historians but they were, nonetheless, inundated with their role in the construction from newspapers and other media sources. As the construction neared its final days newspapers hurriedly raved over the industrialists, capitalists, and government officials that would attend the closing ceremony.<sup>147</sup> The final tie, generally a wooden beam but in this case ceremonial metal laid perpendicular to the railroad tracks, according to the *New York Times* “will be laid by Leland Stanford on Saturday next, thus completing the Pacific Railroad.”<sup>148</sup> While Stanford reveled in the glory of laying the last railroad tie, laborers laid thousands, millions before it and their blood, sweat, and tears—their literal bodies—were occasionally left on the tracks. The working class, particularly Chinese and Irish immigrants, were the true builders of the

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> While Raynor oftentimes seem to portray the Big Four’s lust for money as a driver of progress, he does admit that sanctioned murder and propaganda were not alien to Stanford, Huntington, Hopkins, and Crocker. Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> “The Pacific Railroad: Further Particulars of the Ceremonies at Promontory, Utah- Sentiments and Speeches- the Future Policy of the Road- Enthusiasm at the Conclusion of the Work,” *New York Times* (New York, New York), May 12, 1869.

<sup>148</sup> “The Last Tie of the Central Pacific Railroad,” *New York Times* (New York, New York), May 5, 1869. The tie Leland Stanford laid was not wood but instead gold, a symbolic gesture.

transcontinental railroad but their contributions were relegated to a mere spectre of their work; invisible to the public. Henry David Thoreau was one of the few people who questioned the social costs of the railroad, expressing:

“We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us. Did you ever think what those sleepers are that underlie the railroad? Each one is a man.... The rails are laid on them, and they are covered with sand, and the cars run smoothly over them. They are sound sleepers, I assure you. And every few years a new lot is laid down and run over; so that, if some have the pleasure of riding on a rail, others have the misfortune to be ridden upon.”<sup>149</sup>

The photographic collections of Alfred A. Hart and Andrew J. Russell of the construction of the transcontinental railroad reinforced the notion that money and machines- what was essentially the influence of the Big Four or the machinery of capitalism- was paramount to the project while the working class were inconsequential by producing photographs that have a shocking absence of labor.

Hart and Russell had a talent for photographing the successful traversal of territorial barriers by the Central and Union Pacific but never the labor that actually crafted them. In the early 1860s many doubted these barriers were traversable in the first place. In 1862 an Indiana state representative warned that the transcontinental railroad “could never be constructed on terms applicable to ordinary roads... It is to be constructed through almost impassable mountains, deep ravines, canyons, gorges, and over arid and sandy plains.”<sup>150</sup> His fears were mostly unwarranted, probably because he was from the unreasonably flat state of Indiana, as the “almost impassable mountains, deep ravines,

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<sup>149</sup> Henry David Thoreau, Bradford Torrey, and Franklin Benjamin Sandborn. *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau: V Excursions and Poems*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1906.

<sup>150</sup> Burton W. Folsom, *The Myth of the Robber Barons: A New Look at the Rise of Big Business in America* (Virginia: Young America's Foundation, 1991) pg. 31

gorges, and... arid and sandy plains,” as referenced by the Representative, were indeed passed.

This is most apparent in the photographs of Bloomer’s and Hall’s Cut which were two deep corridors fashioned for the railroad through ridges of pure granite. At the time, tunnels through granite had no precedent.<sup>151</sup> As experimentation began the workingmen slowly, using black powder explosives, forged a path through Bloomer’s Cut. A marker at Bloomer’s Cut commemorates the Chinese laborers who had been hired to clear the path through. It declared “The overwhelming task of construction was undertaken by the diligent, hard working efforts of a small band of Chinese laborers. Using picks, shovels and black powder, they inched their way through the conglomerate rock cemented together with rock-hard clay.”<sup>152</sup> Unfortunately, many Americans would never have the opportunity to read the marker and instead were exposed to the photographs of Alfred A. Hart, which did not include even a hint of the “diligent, hardworking efforts of a small band of Chinese laborers,” according the marker, that had completed the construction.<sup>153</sup>

The initial photograph taken by Hart at Bloomer’s Cut is modeled from the perspective of an approaching locomotive from Sacramento, California heading east.<sup>154</sup> It reveals an unassuming, empty sight as the corridor itself is hidden by the angle of photography. The next photograph in the collection guides the viewer along the same tracks deep into the corridor.<sup>155</sup> The refashioning of the earth is now evident and sense of

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<sup>151</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nothing Like It in the World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), pg. 147.

<sup>152</sup> William F. Chew, *Nameless Builders of the Transcontinental Railway: The Chinese Workers of the Central Pacific Railroad*, (Trafford, 2004): pg. 75.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Alfred A. Hart, #08. [http://cpr.org/Museum/Photo-Gallery/\\_hart\\_008.html](http://cpr.org/Museum/Photo-Gallery/_hart_008.html).

<sup>155</sup> Alfred A. Hart, #09. [http://cpr.org/Museum/Photo-Gallery/\\_hart\\_009.html](http://cpr.org/Museum/Photo-Gallery/_hart_009.html).



scale is overwhelming. The tracks of the Pacific Railroad wind through the photograph to the obscured horizon, only positioned thinly between the walls of the corridor. The enormous walls tower above the camera at a height where they seem to block the sky itself. To position the camera as if it is a locomotive traversing the newly formed corridor is a captivating choice by Hart as the similarities in the camera and the locomotive become more apparent. The notion that both machines, if we were to assume a more personified view of them, have similar outlooks on the world around them then this set of photographs would be an ideal representation of such similarity. The similarity, at heart, conveys a machine-centric view of the world as viewers were forced to explore Bloomer's Cut through the eyes of the machine, a considerably different perspective than cultural productions of the early-modern. The perspective also serves to further alienate humans as not only are humans, nevermind laborers, never in attendance in any of the photographs of Bloomer's Cut, but any human on the tracks would be out of place. They would not be the subject of the photograph but rather the victim of the oncoming locomotive.

While Hart emphasized the perspective of the locomotive on its travel through the narrow and deep corridor of Bloomer's Cut, some of his most striking photographs are taken above the corridor; what Hart designated on his stereographs as a "birdseye



#231 by Alfred A. Hart.

view.”<sup>156</sup> One of these photographs is of a locomotive traversing the corridor with a full load of railroad cars in tow and leads to an exceptionally evident sense of scale. The walls are large and imposing while the locomotive is small and modest. The corridor walls hug the locomotive at an incredibly close distance; the common term “fits like a glove” applies perfectly. It is difficult to imagine how laborers were able to safely employ black powder explosives to fabricate the corridor. Hart’s photographs of Bloomer’s Cut not only ignored the laborers that fabricated it but also produced the notion that humans belonged only as passengers of the machine. The landscape of Bloomer’s Cut was produced for one purpose, the machine. Hart’s photography never swayed in producing a narrative that conveyed the machine at home inside Bloomer’s Cut. Humans, on the other hand, only are ever in the minds of viewers as obscured passengers; never in any role of consequence or agency.

Andrew J. Russell was just as captivated as Hart in the impressions of machines on the Earth as well as neglecting the importance of laborers. In 1869, near the border of Wyoming and Nebraska, inside Albany County, Wyoming, Russell approached Hall’s Cut. The corridor that the Union Pacific Railroad Company excavated was one thousand feet long, two hundred feet longer than Bloomer’s Cut, but only twenty five feet in height, less than half of the height of Bloomer’s Cut.<sup>157</sup> While a less impressive sight due to its mere twenty five feet in height, it still remains a marvel to witness due to the mass of granite that had to be moved to make way for the rails. Like Hart, Russell made it to

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<sup>156</sup> Alfred A. Hart, #231. <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/82294/alfred-a-hart-carleton-watkins-bloomer-cut-near-auburn-800-feet-long-and-63-feet-high-american-1866-1869/http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/82294/alfred-a-hart-carleton-watkins-bloomer-cut-near-auburn-800-feet-long-and-63-feet-high-american-1866-1869/>

<sup>157</sup> Andrew J. Russell, *Hall’s Cut*. 1869. <http://collections.museumca.org/?q=collection-item/h75107111>

Hall's Cut after construction had finished. Though obvious signs of blasting and machine intrusion are evident, the actual machines and construction workers were already farther into the frontier. Like Bloomer's Cut before it, Hall's Cut was yet another example of a significant barrier refashioned for use by the locomotive with not even an inkling of the human effort that went into construction.

Russell only took one photograph of Hall's Cut.<sup>158</sup> In a similar manner as Hart, the camera is positioned on the tracks heading into the corridor; the perspective of an approaching locomotive. Flanking the camera on both sides and even deep into the corridor is an abundance of snow. The contrast of the snow with the granite corridor is intense, the snow seemingly blinding in its whiteness. The walls of the corridor are rough but cannot be described as towering as they had been at Bloomer's Cut. Unlike any



*Hall's Cut* by Andrew J. Russell. 1869.  
From *The Great West Illustrated in a  
Series of Photographic Views Across the*

photograph taken of Bloomer's Cut, Russell included a man. The man is standing by his lonesome inside Hall's Cut; clearly not the subject of the photograph as he is rather far from the camera and cloaked in black. A shadow with no defining features. His identity unknowable, though, judging by the lack of tools or other laborers, he does not

look to be a working man. His bowler hat is no clue to his identity as it was the most

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

common hat of the era in the West.<sup>159</sup> His existence puts the viewer in a superior position, a position where the viewer identifies more with the machine than the man. He is also a perfect representation, though not purposeful in any sense, of the underlying structures of power, the capitalists themselves, that made these large cuts through solid granite possible. It is a portrayal of the way in which photography exemplified the endurance of capitalism to complete a nearly impossible endeavor but still retain some mystique, some mystery.

The historian W. Hixson in his book *American Settler Colonialism* described settlement of the West as preceding “the arrival of military or civilian authority” where settlers were the primary controlling agent in the westward spread of society.<sup>160</sup> Though that may be a more colorful fabrication, the first American transcontinental railroad did not precede military or civil authority in reality or the cultural forms that sprang up to document it. It was organized by capitalists and statesmen and built by the industrial working class. Whereas cultural productions of the early-modern oftentimes centered settlers braving a harsh frontier in a rather lonely manner in their pursuit of progress westward, the photographs of the construction of the transcontinental railroad rarely incorporated humans and, when they did, even more rarely laborers. The narratives surrounding the construction were of popular moneyed interests, i.e. the structures of the modern bourgeoisie in both the machinery of the railroads and capitalism itself, primarily exemplified through the locomotive. Bloomer’s and Hall’s Cut, two of the most

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<sup>159</sup> Contrary to popular belief, the bowler hat was the most popular hat in the West and was said to be “The hat that won the West” by the newspaper journalist Lucius Beebe in 1957. Lucius Beebe, “The Hat That Won the West,” *The Desert News* (Salt Lake City, Utah), October 26, 1957.

<sup>160</sup> Walter L. Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): pg. 114.

impressive feats of engineering and ingenuity in the whole construction of the transcontinental railroad, were a representation of the success of the machinery and the institutions of capitalism to solve problems and propel progress. Still, it was obvious from the photographs that humans were not meant to be the focus of such features as they were built primarily for machines; the only humans traversing such obstacles aboard the locomotive and at the will of the machine. Americans viewing the photographs of the transcontinental railroad were inundated with news reports of the capitalists who had made it possible. They were exposed to a modern notion that progress was guided by money and machines; by the institutional structures of capitalism and a modern government that supported it. The human-centricity that was so obvious in the early-modern had given way to a non-human centered modernity that celebrated the birth and spread of powerful capitalist institutions and beliefs.

### **“The Asiatic Contingent of the Grand Army of Civilization”**

*The Asiatic continent of the grand army of civilization* was a name engineered by newspapers of the Chinese laborers that made the trip across the Pacific Ocean to build the transcontinental railroad. To California locals they were known simply as Crocker’s pets.<sup>161</sup> Charles Crocker was one of the “Big Four” and took an active role in the recruiting of labor and construction of the Central Pacific’s spur of the transcontinental railroad. He was widely recognized for the favorable words he spoke of the Chinese laborers and preferred their company. He had a handyman named Ah Ling follow his

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<sup>161</sup> Adele Nathan, *The Building of the First Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Random House, 1950), pg. 86.

every move. Their relationship transformed Ling into a close confidant.<sup>162</sup> Crocker was quoted saying “Let me have more of these Chinamen.”<sup>163</sup> Thankful for their service leading up to the Golden Spike Ceremony, Crocker celebrated their achievements in his speech; “I wish to call to your minds that the early completion of this railroad we have built has been in large measure due to that poor, despised class laborers called the Chinese — to the fidelity and industry they have shown.”<sup>164</sup> Crocker was not alone in his outward admiration. In 1865, S.S. Montague wrote in his annual report

“It became apparent early in the season that the amount of labor likely to be required during the summer could only be supplied by employment of the Chinese element in our population. Some distrust was at first felt regarding capacity of this class for the services required, but the experiment has proved eminently successful. They are faithful and industrious and, under proper supervision, soon become skillful in the performance of their duty. Many of them are becoming very expert in drilling, blasting and other departments of rock work.”<sup>165</sup>

At the Golden Spike Ceremony, J.H. Strobridge invited the Chinese laborers to dine with him in his railroad car. They were cheered as they entered and were, supposedly, remembered as fine representatives of their race; an odd compliment that feels like an insult.<sup>166</sup>

Despite the kind words, Chinese laborers were not actually treated that well on the transcontinental railroad. A greater racism permeated throughout America in regards to the Chinese and Chinese immigration was taken as a consistent issue for the American government. Outward enthusiasm toward Chinese laborers may have been the so-called

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<sup>162</sup> Nathan, pg. 84.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid,

<sup>164</sup> Jack Chen, “Linking a Continent and a Nation,” in *Exploring America's Past: A Reader in Social, Political, and Cultural History, 1865-Present*, ed. Richard A. Greenwald (New York: University Press of America, 1996), pg. 33

<sup>165</sup> George Kraus, “Chinese Laborers at the Construction of the Central Pacific,” *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Winter 1969, Vol. 37, No. 1, pages 41-57.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

‘flavor of the month’ but it did not hide the severity of discrimination and poverty that Chinese laborers encountered every day. In 1867, several thousand Chinese laborers struck for better pay, safer conditions, and an end to beatings as a form of discipline. The Central Pacific, including Crocker, broke the strike by withholding food supplies from the Chinese, showing not reverence but rather contempt.<sup>167</sup> When Irish laborers encountered the Chinese they sometimes jeered and threw objects at them. In 1869, Irish laborers were said to have set off powder charges near the Chinese; severely injuring many.<sup>168</sup> Less than fifteen years after the construction of the transcontinental railroad the United States government would codify racism against the Chinese into law through the Chinese Exclusion Act. The act banned entrance to the United States by Chinese immigrants for the purpose of “protecting certain localities from danger;” a political nuanced way for American politicians of the era to pass a discriminatory law that sought to establish the Chinese as less than human.<sup>169</sup> While Crocker and his associates enjoyed paying lip service to the Chinese as quality laborers and strong individuals, their actions in the face of Chinese humanity and the actions of the nation spoke differently.

Whether the Chinese were being applauded for their diligent work on the tracks of the transcontinental railroad or demonized as foreigners while their bodies were codified into discriminatory laws, a certain modern mindset had prevailed that defined work. Early-modern painted works did not have Chinese immigrants and the early-modern

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<sup>167</sup> David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 68.

<sup>168</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nothing Like It in the World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad 1863-1869* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), pg. 122.

<sup>169</sup> An act to execute certain treaty stipulations relating to the Chinese, May 6, 1882; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1996; General Records of the United States Government; Record Group 11; National Archives.

American identity did not deal with Chinese immigration at the same level, at least culturally, as the American nation had at the end of the nineteenth century. It is impossible to compare the representations of the Chinese in early-modern and modern American culture. However, drawing on the treatment of Native American Indians in the culture of the early-modern as inspiration, it is easy to see that the Chinese would have been labeled as an 'other.' Another 'race,' as the early-modern and modern world to some extent classified many national identities under, for the figurative 'light' of 'civilization' to reach.<sup>170</sup> In modern representations of the Chinese, they were not to be the recipients of 'civilization,' as they would have been in the early-modern, but rather judged to be modern through certain criteria of work including diligence, hard work, obedience, etc.

Though there is only one clear photograph taken by Alfred A. Hart of the Chinese laborers on the transcontinental railroad, the role produced for them by Crocker and the Central Pacific is unambiguous.<sup>171</sup> The photograph portrays eight Chinese men standing and sitting among a garden of rocks. While it is much harder to hide the traditional Chinese



*No. 119 Laborers and Rocks by Alfred A. Hart.*

<sup>170</sup> Really, back to that old concept from Chapter I of a city-upon a hill. That divine and/or humanitarian mission to 'civilize' the 'savage.'

<sup>171</sup> Alfred A. Hart, "Laborers and Rocks." [http://cprr.org/Museum/Photo-Gallery/\\_hart\\_119.html](http://cprr.org/Museum/Photo-Gallery/_hart_119.html)



clothing in photographs than in speech, they look similar in almost every way to Irish laborers, save for their hats. They did not have the traditional bowler hats that were so ubiquitous on the frontier but rather the conical hats that were common among Chinese immigrants.<sup>172</sup> The notion that the Chinese laborers were hard at work was apparent through the photograph as their bodies looked tan from the sun and tired from long working hours. The tools in their hands stood at ready positions for when work would begin again. As the early-modern American identity produced a vision of a rugged individualist American through the toil of their bodies, photographs of Chinese laborers with signs of hard-work were an ideal indication of the modern world that they had encountered and adapted to. Work was on the mind of Crocker and the other Central Pacific managers and on the bodies of these Chinese laborers. They were modernized, to an extent, through their work but only for the time needed to construct the transcontinental railroad through some of the most difficult terrain ever demolished by hand.

The process of modernization, of a certain Americanization, is clear when we turn our attention to the posters of Chinese exclusion produced only a few years later and the stark difference in their portrayal of the Chinese. In one advertisement for the *Workingman's Party of California*, a Chinese immigrant is depicted running from the boot of the white working class; escaping the violence across the Pacific Ocean to China.<sup>173</sup> While the white working-class man is tall enough that only the lower half of his body is clear, the Chinese man is depicted as much smaller and, thereby, weaker. The

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<sup>172</sup> For reference, again. Lucius Beebe.

<sup>173</sup> *Regular Ticket Workingman's Party of California*. 1890s. Historical Society of Pennsylvania. [http://digitallibrary.hsp.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object\\_id/340](http://digitallibrary.hsp.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/340).

initials “W.P.C.” is clear on the booted man- standing for *Workingman’s Party of California*- and the words “Chinese Must Go” written clearly and largely on the top of the image. The Chinese man's face is fearful. The traditional feminization of his body through the portrayal of his queue, the hairstyle where the hair is grown in a long braid in one spot on the head, and his long fingernails were depicted in an exaggerated fashion.



Illustration of Chinese exclusion from the Workingmen's Party of California.

The aim of this advertisement was to stereotype the Chinese as weak, small in stature, and feminine, a far cry from the way in which Hart, Crocker, and others on the transcontinental railroad had characterized them years

earlier.

In 1869 the *Scientific American* celebrated the construction of the transcontinental railroad and paid particular attention to the role of the Chinese laborers.<sup>174</sup> They stated that Chinese laborers had wonderful displays of strength and endurance and exceptional mechanical skill.<sup>175</sup> Chinese supervisors who spoke English were described as “very intelligent men” exhibiting “an extensive acquaintance with railroad matters.”<sup>176</sup> But really, this last quote sums up perfectly the role produced for these Chinese laborers. “The Chinaman is a born railroad builder, and as such he is

<sup>174</sup> “The Chinaman as a Railroad Builder,” *Scientific American*, Volume 21, July 31, 1869, pg. 75.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

destined to be the most useful to California, and, indeed, to the whole Pacific slope.”<sup>177</sup>

Their usefulness to the growing modern bourgeoisie order in American political and economic life led the Chinese laborers to be represented in the speeches and photography surrounding the building of the transcontinental railroad as employing modern characteristics, i.e. diligent, hardworking, knowledgeable, and obedient, to overcome their birth. This narrative, that these modern ideals of work could place a cloak over the savagery of their birth was an important representation of the modern view of progress in civilizations and the modern tendencies of the revolutionary bourgeois to overwrite traditional race-based theories. Americans employed these new definitions of work to imagine themselves as better- in the sense that they were more modern- because they were born with the quality to be workers in a modern society whereas the Chinese had to earn that modernism. Early-modern notions of rugged individualists struggling to spread the ‘light’ of ‘civilization’ to the savageness of the West in a misguided humanitarian mission was replaced by the modern sense that industrial work was the way in which savageness would find the figurative ‘light.’

### **Modern War Bands**

John Gast’s 1872 painting *American Progress* incorporated Native American Indians escaping from American expansion by heading west.<sup>178</sup> Their fearful faces and exhausted bodies were illustrated alongside a herd of wild buffalo and a defensive bear; all symbols of a ‘savage’ landscape. An encroaching angelic figure and characters of American expansion including wagons, locomotives, and settlers are portrayed

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Gast, *American Progress*.

conquering the remaining portions of the canvas leaving little room for the fleeing Natives. The underlying message of Gast's painting which defined the early-modern American consciousness was that the 'savage' realm of the West, including the Native American Indians that resided within it, was in a greater historical process of being 'civilized' by the aspirations of Euro-American settlers.<sup>179</sup> A familiar belief among Americans for a substantial portion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was that settlement would "awaken the Indian to the light of the 'social' arts and beliefs and the glories of order and cultivation," according to Joel Barlow, a poet of the era<sup>180</sup>

The construction of the Pacific Railroad witnessed an equal amount of brutality with the local Native American Indian tribes as had settlement in the past. Building the transcontinental railroad meant traversing hostile land, land that the Native American Indian tribes considered home and would defend through violence. Allied together in 1865, the Northern Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Sioux rallied over 1,000 warriors commanded by Brule Sioux Spotted Tail to raid American settlements, forts, and wagon trails. The small frontier town of Julesburg and a nearby fort were so badly ravaged that the remains of the slaughtered Americans were scattered among a nearby riverbed in a horrific fashion. The raiders then swept forward, roaring through the plains where they ravaged food caravans on the trail toward Denver, Colorado and demolished telegraph wires between New York and San Francisco. Panic swept the West as food shortages were widespread and communication rendered difficult.

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<sup>179</sup> The "Introduction" to this thesis established the early-modern belief in a world that moved inevitably westward whereas there was a clear line of Euro-American settlement that was the "outer edge of civilization." Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (presentation, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, Illinois, 1893).

<sup>180</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1973): pg. 342.

So grave was this threat that General Dodge and his army tasked with hunting down Confederate guerrillas in St. Louis were reassigned to combating the Native American Indian threat. Dodge marched west and ordered all American soldiers on the plains to “attack all bodies of hostile Indians large or small... stay with them and pound them until they move north of the Platte or South of Arkansas.”<sup>181</sup> Dodge’s strategy was successful, at least for the moment. The marauders were forced north of the Platte River and south of the Arkansas River, leaving a pathway for overland routes through the heart of the continent. A peace treaty was signed that awarded small concessions as incentive to honor these boundaries.<sup>182</sup> Unfortunately, as Dodge predicted, the peace did not last. In the years following as the Union Pacific Railroad Company worked its way deeper into the frontier attacks resumed. Livestock was stolen, work crews victimized, surveyors killed, and even the iron rails themselves were occasionally sabotaged.<sup>183</sup> Strangely, the threat of the Native American Indian tribes to the construction of the first American transcontinental railroad and the genocidal way that the United States Army responded were never genuinely conveyed through the photographs of Alfred A. Hart and Andrew J. Russell.

Rather, conveyed through the photographs of Native American Indians during the construction of the transcontinental railroad was the extinction of space in the American consciousness. Glancing at depictions of Native American Indians in the painted works of the early-modern they are often presented as the recipients of a humanitarian and even

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<sup>181</sup> David Haward Bain, *Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Penguin Group, 1999), pg. 210.

<sup>182</sup> The treaty was named “Treaty of the Little Arkansas” and was inherently flawed. See, Wilbur Sturtevant Nye, *Plains Indian Raiders: The Final Phases of Warfare from the Arkansas to the Red River* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman and London: 1974).

<sup>183</sup> Bain, *Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad*, pg. 210-216.

divine spread of ‘civilization’ in that artists often employed divine imagery, illumination, or other tools to emphasize a figurative ‘light’ reaching them.<sup>184</sup> Yet, photography challenged the value of space to Americans’ understanding of the relationship between Native American Indians and American society by depicting the modern world as having had ‘crashed’ into the lives of Native American Indians. The way in which Russell positioned traditional dress, dwellings, and other cultural baggage of Native American Indians alongside modern industrial comforts and entertainment was employed by Americans to imagine that the continental space that once divided ‘civilization’ from ‘savagery’ or in geographical terms the east and the west coasts of the United States from one another was all but gone. Viewing these photographs alongside the photographs of the locomotive permitted Americans to understand the locomotive as an agent of this destruction in the ways it made the traversal of space trivial.<sup>185</sup>

Russell’s photograph titled “Group of Ute Indians on the Warpath” depicts this destruction of space; of the crash of the modern world into traditional worlds superbly.<sup>186</sup> The photograph incorporated sixteen Ute men on horseback facing the camera. Their faces are stoic and their heads held high. Many dress in the traditional clothes of the Utes but some of their apparel is decidedly American. The stetson and bowler hats are an obvious sign of more modern apparel and the gentlemen on the right appears to be wearing a suit. A few are even carrying firearms, products of the industrial world. Their

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<sup>184</sup> See John Gast’s painting *American Progress* for a perfect representation of this. Gast, *American Progress*.

<sup>185</sup> See the section “Motionless Society” in this chapter for my argument in regards to the representation of space in the photography of the modern as compared to painted works of the early-modern.

<sup>186</sup> Andrew J. Russell, *Group of Ute Indians on a Warpath*. 1868, Glass Plate Negative, Oakland Museum of California. <http://collections.museumca.org/?q=collection-item/h694592034>.

horses characterized a mode of travel that had defined the early-modern frontier which should be contrasted with the locomotive that had dominated the rest of the photographs in Russell's collection. The fence in the background is significant, more so than its position denotes, because it portrays the expansion of the American ideal of property rights into a setting that the early-modern had deemed 'savage.' The photograph not only juxtaposed modern comforts with traditional Native American Indian cultural beliefs but also allowed Americans to imagine their society as the dominant force in the frontier and the locomotive as having been an agent of its spread. The space of 'savageness,' as it had been portrayed in the early-modern culture, had been, figuratively of course, crashed into by the modern world and the resulting explosion shaped the identity of Native American Indians in the modern American consciousness as having had no choice but to embrace, at least in part, modern comforts.

Another of Russell's photographs that perpetuated this crash of modernity was titled "Squaws gambling for beads."<sup>187</sup> A 'Squaw' is a term for Native American Indian



*Group of Ute Indians on the War Path* by Andrew J. Russell, 1868. *Squaws Gambling for Beads* by Andrew J. Russell, 1869.

women, often used contemptuously with negative connotations. In the photograph, five women meet around what looks to be a rawhide matt gambling with a standard 52 card deck.<sup>188</sup> Three others stood watching. Their clothes are a traditional style for the Plains Indians but, again, some of their hats are of American faire. Their dwellings, teepees, are positioned behind them. Yet again Russell provides a relatively peaceful scene conveying Native American Indians as partaking in contemporary activities but with examples of traditional cultural items and beliefs. The clash of traditional native culture with activities contemporary to Russell's

<sup>187</sup> Andrew J. Russell, *Squaws Gambling for Beads*. 1869, Glass Plate Negative, Oakland Museum of California. <http://collections.museumca.org/?q=collection-item/h694592445>

<sup>188</sup> Though Russell never once chronicled the gambling halls built along the construction of the transcontinental railroad for workers to participate in, it was a relatively common affair. See, Edward J. Renehan, Jr, *The Transcontinental Railroad: The Gateway to the West* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers: 2007), pg. 42.



time produced a sense of a violent crash that resulted in an ability for Americans to connect with the lives of Native American Indians as they were now understood to inhabit the same world.

This so-called ‘crash of modernity’ that Russell portrayed was later witnessed at the 1893 Chicago World’s Columbian Fair. Designed for the fair was a group of exhibits titled “the stages of development of mankind” that was this modern notion that all the peoples of the earth can be ranked on the development scale from ‘savage’ to ‘civilized.’ At one side would be, as the fair promoters put it, the least advanced races and at the center would be the modern metropolis; denoting, of course, American civilization.<sup>189</sup> This exhibit incorporated Native American Indian encampments of all kinds and living specimens for the purpose of “honor[ing] Native Americans and highlight[ing] their efforts to adapt to the white world.”<sup>190</sup> In this exhibit Americans were able to physically experience the shrinking of space. ‘Savagery,’ as Americans had thought these groups were to be labeled as, was not experienced on some faraway frontier but rather in an American city, a short walk away from the modern metropolis. Americans also experienced, as fair promoters sought to make relevant, the ways that the modern world had penetrated Native American Indian life. As Russell had created decades earlier in his photographs, the fair promotions allowed Americans to not only visualize the extinction of space but experience it physically.

Less visually obvious in Russell’s photographic collection of the construction of the transcontinental railroad was the dawn of the Native American Indian role in the

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<sup>189</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: University of Oklahoma, 1992).

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

frontier myth that would later be popularized by Western style films of the twentieth century. That is, the portrayal of Native American Indians as the primary or secondary antagonists through which white Americans had to overcome as part of their 'hero's journey' rather than, as in the early-modern, receipts of 'civilization.'<sup>191</sup> In this narrative, the violence of Native American Indians, attributed to some modern notion of 'savagery,' was never a true challenge to American ideals or institutions but rather a challenge to individual Americans. Russell may not have been the sole creator of this myth but the way in which he depicted Native American Indians as completely subordinate to American institutions led Americans to later imagine their role in the frontier much differently than Americans of the early-modern had.

The most incriminating evidence that Russell had sought to neuter the Native American Indian threat in the minds of Americans is simply the insinuation in the name of his photograph "Group of Ute Indians on the War Path."<sup>192</sup> The term 'war path' clearly implies images of death, destruction, scalping, marauding, etc. Yet, Russell paraded a small band of lightly armed men in front of the camera. It is no doubt that Russell would have at least heard of the many deep-seated problems between the construction crews of the transcontinental railroad and Native American Indian tribes.<sup>193</sup> Even if he could never photograph the true threat Native American Indians posed due to the nature of the camera

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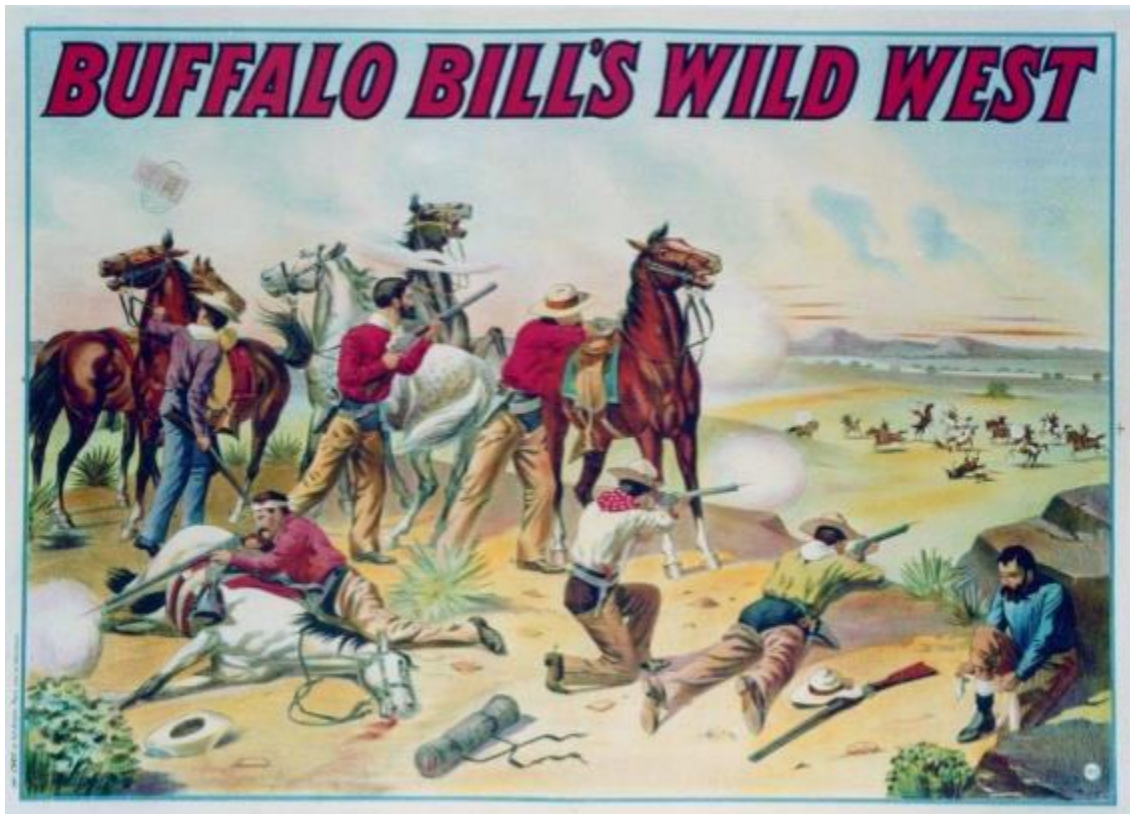
<sup>191</sup> Western Style films have been called the American Epic by Robert Thompson, director of Syracuse University's Bleier Center for Television & Popular Culture. Within an Epic, the author Joseph Campbell argued that the hero followed a specific narrative pattern that he titled the hero's journey. Western style films often employ Native American Indians as the main antagonist or at minimum a difficult challenge in the hero's journey. 'The American epic': Hollywood's Enduring Love for the Western, *The Guardian*. Published October 21, 2016. Assessed April 8, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/oct/21/western-films-hollywood-enduring-genre>

<sup>192</sup> Russell, "Group of Ute Indians on the War Path."

<sup>193</sup> David Haward Bain, *Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Penguin Group, 1999), pg. 210.

and fear for his own safety, he did not have to actively deceive viewers by titling his picture with the words 'war path.' This so-called 'war band' was not the one thousand strong bands of marauders that had swept through the plains only a few years earlier, but rather a friendly, well friendly enough to stop and take a picture, tribe that had been happy enough to oblige Russell. This neutered portrayal is vital to twentieth century understandings of the role of Native American Indians in the frontier as antagonists to, or at least an outside force that challenged heroes of American epics rather than a society of their own that posed a true militaristic risk to expanding American institutions.

The production of the frontier myth that had been depicted by Russell in his photography of Native American Indians can clearly be witnessed in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show that most famously operated at the 1893 Chicago World Columbian



*Advertisement for Buffalo Bill's Wild West Shows at the World Columbian Exposition, April 27, 1893. Chicago, Illinois.*

Exposition. One reporter called it “the greatest show” he had ever seen.<sup>194</sup> The advertising for the show provides a great insight into how Russell’s photographs were being imagined by others to build a frontier myth. One poster in particular that was printed for the 1893 Chicago Columbian World’s Fair depicts a group of white American settlers hurting and surrounded by native American Indians as they defend their position with the use of firearms.<sup>195</sup> One horse lies dead while a man with a bandaged head leans over the top of it to aim down the sights of his rifle. Another man off to the right bandages his legs, symbols of the grave struggle that was currently taking place. The rest of the white settlers took up a position on the ridgeline with their rifles in hand to defend their position. Their bodies firm and unwavering; brave and tough in their demeanor. The Native American Indians that surround them are off into the distance, an unknowable force that, surprisingly, was only between ten and twenty men.

This advertisement did not depict *Custer’s Last Stand*, yet, it immortalized the ideas behind it. Here we have a portrayal of the Native American Indians as the means by which white Americans were tested, challenged and transformed from ignorance to rugged individualists. The pain of the white settlers is felt through the bandaged wounds and dead horses but it was individual pain not societal pain. The group of Native American Indians were not shown as a threat to greater American institutions in that the white settlers they attacked were not depicted in military uniforms or as any part of an institutional system and their numbers were far too small to be that of a true army. Instead, this notion that white settlers traveled west and faced the threat of Native

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<sup>194</sup> Richard A. Serrano, *American Endurance: Buffalo Bill, the Great Cowboy Race of 1893 and the Vanishing West* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2016), pg. 49.

<sup>195</sup> *Advertisement for Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Shows at the World Columbian Exposition*, April 27, 1893. Chicago, Illinois.

American Indian attacks on their family all alone was in itself a myth but a myth that led to the neutering of the true role that Native American Indians played in the frontier.

Where Native American Indian tribes and the United States government had clashed over land rights and American expansion into Native territory, the role produced for them through the modern American visual representations portrayed them as mere antagonists in individual hero journeys.

## **Conclusion**

In 1893 Chicago hosted the Columbian World's Fair that coincided with a "period of immense change in America and the world at large."<sup>196</sup> Industrialism had accelerated at a pace where trolleys and railroads operated alongside horses and buggies. Fairgoers viewed the exhibits of the 'West' as mere nostalgic fun alongside attractions like the Metropolis of the Future and Machinery Hall that outlined the future of American progress. The fair was filled with almost 250,000 individual innovations from new steam engines to other industrial goods and Americans were told that these goods would make their lives more convenient and orderly.<sup>197</sup> Still, the American consciousness did not transform overnight and the 1893 Chicago Columbian World's Fair was a culmination of a larger cultural transformation. This chapter has argued that the photographs of the construction of the first transcontinental railroad by Alfred A. Hart and Andrew J. Russell was paramount to the production of a new, more modern American identity in that they destroyed all notions of an east-to-west national paradigm, centered the locomotive as the

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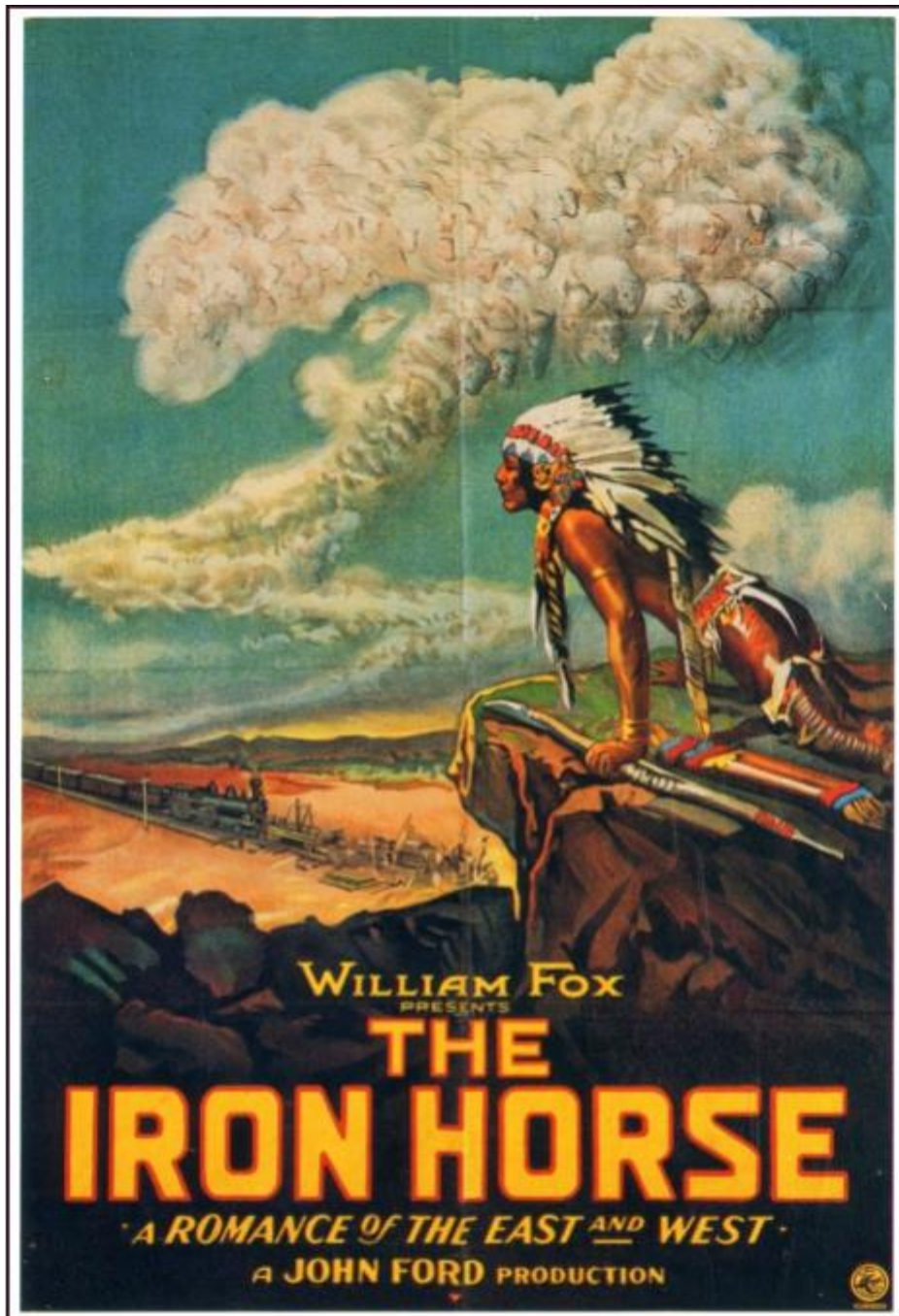
<sup>196</sup> Chaim M. Rosenberg, *America at the Fair: Chicago's 1893 World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), pg. IX.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

controlling agent of progress rather than the human-centricity of the settler, ignored the hard-work and achievements of labor in construction efforts, lauded the role of capitalism and the government in progress, employed Chinese labor as the means through which the ability to work successfully in industrial capitalism was associated with modernity, and built a new role for Native American Indians that not only reinforced the destruction of space in society but allowed Americans to imagine a frontier myth where Native American Indians were depicted as conquered by the American civilizing mission. . The early-modern identity that had once dominated painted works and other cultural mediums was transformed by the photography of the transcontinental railroad. The new style, form, and function of Russell's and Hart's photographs imagined the modern world they inhabited as spaceless, immediate, run by the powerful institutions of capitalism and governments friendly to it, progressed forward in time by the machine, shaped around industrial work, and as the product of the completion of the early-modern mission.

### Chapter III:

The Moving Picture, the Western, and *The Iron Horse*



Theatrical release poster for *The Iron Horse* by John Ford.

As Americans entered their gilded movie palaces to view the spectacle of John Ford's 1924 film *The Iron Horse* they were inevitably exposed to the film's theatrical release poster.<sup>198</sup> The style, form, and function of the poster closely resembled the photographs authored by Alfred A. Hart and Andrew J. Russell of the construction of the transcontinental railroad decades earlier. The poster indulged an American imagination that perceived the world as directionally chaotic. "A Romance of the East and the West" read the subtitle of the film; a narrative of consolidation that replaced one of westward conquest.<sup>199</sup> The illusion was completed by the relatively aimless direction of the locomotive toward the right of the poster; a far cry from the early-modern painted works that consistently portrayed its subjects moving through both time and space in a leftward direction. What's more, the poster entertained a narrative of a world wholly dominated by the machinery of capitalism; both in literal machinery and in the institutions that operated in the daily lives of average Americans. By centering the locomotive in the poster and portraying it as the lone symbol of industrialization and civilization in the sparse lifeless desert, it was employed by Americans to appreciate capitalism as the driving force of progress and incontrovertible change in society. The 'savage' space of the West that had for so long in the early-modern imagination built an American spirit of a human-centric rugged individualism was illustrated in the poster as being anxiously ruined by the encroaching locomotive. The locomotive's progress literally diminished the remaining land between it and the hostile- denoted by the bow in his hand and the strain of his body- Native American Indian peering over a cliff top above. An apparition of a herd of buffalo

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<sup>198</sup> For more information on movie palaces see, Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of Movie Theatre* (Yale University Press, 1994); *The Iron Horse*, directed by John Ford (William Fox Corporation; 1924).

<sup>199</sup> *The Iron Horse*, directed by John Ford (William Fox Corporation; 1924).



in the clouds acted as a reaffirmation that the West's fabled past was nothing more than a legend; a myth of days past. The photographs of Hart and Russell had an undeniable impact on the theatrical poster for *The Iron Horse* and imagined their world as modern; celebrating the advancements of industrialization on their lives and cultural landscape.

The theatrical release poster for *The Iron Horse* may have been heavily influenced by the photographic collections of Hart and Russell but it did a abysmal job of communicating to audiences the premise of the film. It neglected to highlight any of the principal characters, the central conflict, the scheming villain, nor the love story that permeated throughout. Complicating matters further was the propensity of early twentieth century Western style Hollywood films, *The Iron Horse* included, to treat modernity in numerous intricate and unforeseen ways. Historians have long debated the way modernity has been treated in Westerns. The historian Will Wright argued that the Western was 'social propaganda' that "reinforce[d] rather than challenge[d]" modernity.<sup>200</sup> William Carter, however, argued that "Western's cannot but be affected and, to some extent, conditioned by modern troubles."<sup>201</sup> An even more intrepid argument from the historian James K Folsam is that Westerns constructed a narrative that was "actively critical of the industrial-capitalist *present*."<sup>202</sup> Is the Western, then, mere 'social propaganda' or a grande tool of the avant-garde to challenge this new industrial modernity?

To a certain extent, *The Iron Horse* did challenge modernity. It pitted an early-modern frontiersmen hero, the white American cowboy defined by his rugged

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<sup>200</sup> Will Wright, *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pg. 23.

<sup>201</sup> Matthew Carter, *Myth of the Western: New Perspective on Hollywood's Frontier Narrative* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pg. 117.

<sup>202</sup> James K Folsam in *Ibid*.

individualism and vigilant sense of justice, against a wholly modern industrial present that idealized repetitive work and strong hierarchies of power such as the justice system. The ensuing battle was, as Carter put it, “conditioned by modern troubles.”<sup>203</sup> Ultimately, however, as many Westerns had done, the early-modern hero is portrayed as tragic and ill-equipped to handle the modern world; his challenge a failure. This chapter, therefore, will argue that *The Iron Horse* built on the visual culture established by Hart and Russell decades earlier by manufacturing a wholly modern representation of the world and asked Americans to employ the tragic early-modern hero to grapple with it, challenge its tenets and beliefs, but ultimately welcome it as the de facto condition of their society.

The story of *The Iron Horse* is, truly, an early-modern hero pitted against a wholly modern world. It wished to be a strict history. Some of its first text touted it as a “pictorial history” and “accurate and faithful in every particular fact.”<sup>204</sup> In reality it was a fiction. It was an American Epic that just so happened to transpire on the half-built tracks of the transcontinental railroad and largely a story of love and betrayal, of capitalists and folk heroes, of violent natives and a strong government, of powerful railroads, and, at its core, a story of modern nation building.<sup>205</sup> The protagonist of the film, Dave Brandon, a frontiersman who experienced the violence and lawlessness of the West as a child when he watched his father die at the hands of a renegade and his Native American Indian accomplices, is forced into the modern world of the transcontinental

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> *The Iron Horse*, directed by John Ford (1924).

<sup>205</sup> According to Robert Thompson, director of Syracuse University's Bleier Center for Television & Popular Culture, “[Americans] don't have a single text like *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey* but the western is our story.. the western has always been the American epic.” Robert Thompson in Stuart Miller, “The American epic: Hollywood's enduring love for the western,” *The Guardian*, (October 21, 2016): accessed November 4, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/oct/21/western-films-hollywood-enduring-genre>.

railroad as an adult where the story of the film transpires. His early-modern ideals a constant quality of his character that is reaffirmed to the audience through his actions in defending his honor through violence, reluctance to abandon the frontier life, and his role as a surveyor, someone who went ahead of the construction to explore possible routes, for the transcontinental railroad. Along the tracks of the transcontinental railroad he reunites with a long lost love, Miriam Marsh, who he knew as a boy and employs his knowledge of the frontier to chart a path for the transcontinental railroad through a problematic mountain range. Unbeknownst to him, Miriam Marsh's fiancé and chief engineer for the railroad, Peter Jesson, and a local capitalist named Deroux had conspired against Brandon and the railroad company to hide Brandon's findings. Brandon's route, which cut the mileage of the proposed railroad tracks down significantly, bypassed Deroux's land. While Deroux cared little for the success of the railroad, his relatively inexpensive land would net him a fortune when purchased by the Union Pacific Railroad Company. His greed was palpable and may have bankrupted the Union Pacific, if not for Brandon's shorter route, the same route Brandon's father showed him when he was a child. The conflict was only resolved after Jesson tried to murder Brandon on multiple occasions, ending only by a fist fight where it was rather unclear if Jesson died at the hands of Brandon. Still, as one conflict ends, another begins. The movie continues on to include a final fight between Brandon and Deroux, the architect of the conspiracy and murderer of Brandon's father. This battle, unlike the one with Jesson, was clear. Brandon's victory ends with the death of Deroux. The final scene of the movie is Brandon reuniting with Miriam Marsh at the golden spike ceremony in Promontory Summit, Utah to celebrate the completion of the transcontinental railroad and a rekindling of their love.

The Western Frontier Dave Brandon encounters as an adult, the one created by the director John Ford and the writers of *The Iron Horse*, was a setting founded on an imagined West manufactured by the photographs of the construction of the transcontinental railroad by Alfred A. Hart and Andrew J. Russell. It is clear that John Ford's *The Iron Horse* was not the West of early-modern America. The imagery produced by painters like Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze or John Gast, of a world aligned east-to-west with powerful authorities noticeably absent from the line of Euro-American settlement westward, did not drive any of the conflicts or struggles in the film. Divine manifestation of providence, i.e. that old notion of a 'city upon a hill,' is not the foundation of goodness for the characters. No, Dave Brandon's struggles are wholly the struggles of a man encountering a West defined by its shrinking of a directionally chaotic space, its connections to the powerful institutions of capitalism and a government that supported it, and of a people expecting these modern characteristics to succeed.

### **From Washington to the West in a Flash**

The camera of the motion picture was similar in nature to the camera Alfred A. Hart and Andrew J. Russell carried on their endeavors along the tracks of the transcontinental railroad. It was a machine. A tool of capitalism.<sup>206</sup> Mainly, though, it explored its subjects with a similar sense of immediacy that photography heretofore had done. The silent film ushered viewers along a journey often spanning diverse locations, some worlds away from the other, and over vast swaths of time. Unquestionably, it had

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<sup>206</sup> For more information about the specifics of the motion picture camera see, H. Mario Raimondo-Souto, *Motion Picture Photography: A History 1891-1960* (London: McFarland & Company, inc., Publishers, 2007).

the power to transport its audiences from their homes in the industrial and political centers of the American nation to the faraway lands- for example the Western Frontier- in an inconsequential amount of time; a literal flash. This ruination of time and space was grappled with in a more active way in the cinema as viewers did not have to engage in multiple photographs across various mediums to feel the American civilization spreading effortlessly and instantly. The Western in particular transported audiences to lands once depicted by early-modern artists as requiring immense time and energy to reach. The characters and story of these films, through clever editing and narrative forces, move seamlessly and effortlessly through the worlds of the industrial east and frontier West. Their travels did not present a challenge in and of itself and Americans did not understand, as their early-modern forefathers had, the traversal of the continent as a challenge.

It is important, also, to recognize that, like the photography of the transcontinental railroad, these ruinations of time and space did not arise in a vacuum. The existence and spread of the locomotive that had produced in American culture the understanding that the continent was not some colossal obstacle but rather a landmass that was entirely and effortlessly traversable in an inconsequential amount of time caused these ruinations.<sup>207</sup> The penchant for machines to shrink the world and fragment time, i.e. the immediacy of the world they had produced, may have entered the American visual culture with the photography of the construction of the transcontinental railroad but it was the cinema that

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<sup>207</sup> The historian William G. Thomas argued that the locomotive propelled itself into the daily lives of Americans by revolutionizing “business opportunities, social relationships, and the physical landscape around them.” This transformation is important for understanding the ways in which the locomotive altered the American imagination in regards to space and time. William G. Thomas, *The Iron Way: Railroads, the Civil War, and the Making of Modern America* (London: Yale University press, 2011), pg. 2.

truly cemented the experience in the American identity.<sup>208</sup> The purpose of this section is to explore how *The Iron Horse* and other films grappled with the ruination of time and space, specifically in the way films presented the traversal of the continent as inconsequential, and place it in a worldview that was already being shaped by the modern cultural apparatus including the, now, decades old photographs of the construction of the transcontinental railroad.

The development and widespread adoption of the cinema as a platform for cultural productions can be linked back to the revolution in communication and transportation of the railroad.<sup>209</sup> How else could films travel so far and so thoroughly in so little of a time period as to be widely available to people so quickly? It is for these reasons an analysis of cinema as a unique form of cultural consumption that had its own distinctive process encompassed in the historical period it thrived in, in a similar manner to both photography and the railroads, ruined time and space; i.e. produced immediacy. The historian Ruth Vasey argued in her book *The World According to Hollywood* that “at the most basic level, [the worldwide audience of Hollywood films] led to the economics of scale that underpinned the industry’s output.”<sup>210</sup> Populations from various ethnicities, genders, ages, cultural groups, etc. enjoyed the cinema alongside one another. Vasey continued, “production on this scale meant that movies could not be understood as wholly distinct from one another, either at the level of manufacture or at the level of

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<sup>208</sup> See Chapter II for more information on how machines fragment time.

<sup>209</sup> The historian Maggie Valentine states in her book *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk* that “the American movie theatre... created an emotionally charged atmosphere in which millions of Americans learned about life, culture, politics, romance, and sex through what was shown and implied as both said and suggested on screen.” Not only did the movie theatre find its way into the lives of average Americans but it was, according to Valentine in the least, culturally persuasive. Valentine, pg. xi.

<sup>210</sup> Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), pg. 3.

consumption.”<sup>211</sup> The standardization of Hollywood films into a genre of their own- often encompassing the western, musicals, historical dramas, etc.- led to companies monitoring their own productions as to not jeopardize their chances of success in national and international marketplaces. No longer were cultural productions produced in a finite medium, to be exhibited in a finite location, for a finite audience. The films were mass-produced a near infinite amount of times, displayed on cinemas throughout the world, and done so almost instantaneously. Producers, in the ways in which they design and author culture, were undoubtedly influenced by the mass audience awaiting their productions. Consumers, in a similar vein, understood the culture they consumed as mass culture, understanding movie palaces to be abundant, and, therefore, connected on a continental and, at times, global scale with other consumers. Producers and consumers of the cinema approached this new cultural medium with a sense of immediacy, with little understanding of the hardships of time.

This immediacy can be more readily seen within the films themselves. *The Iron Horse* by John Ford begins in Springfield, Illinois, at an unspecified time merely described as “the days when a transcontinental railroad was but a dream.”<sup>212</sup> Judging by the characters’ age we can assume it is circa 1855. After a short sequence of action where Dave Brandon’s father is killed by a renegade in front of his very eyes on their travels through the frontier, a spatial and temporal shift occurs almost instantly. June, 1862 is introduced as the date and a brief description of the Pacific Railway Act is given through writing. The viewer is then guided through a scene of Abraham Lincoln at the White House in Washington D.C. signing the Pacific Railway Act into law. Almost instantly,

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> *The Iron Horse*, directed by John Ford (1924), 2:38.

again, the viewer's focus shifts to the West, years later as the construction for the transcontinental railroad had begun. The instantaneous transportation that occurs in both temporal and physical space were common in early twentieth century film and continues to be important in film today. Space and time were, and still to some extent are, inconsequential in the American consciousnesses.

While large shifts in space and time are important to the overall narrative of modern culture it is also paramount to dissect the minute details surrounding these shifts to better understand how Americans of the early-twentieth century employed the ruination of space and time. In *The Iron Horse*, towards the end of the film, after the cessation of the main conflicts, Dave Brandon is depicted boarding a stagecoach for California to join the Central Pacific Railroad Company.<sup>213</sup> The scene is sombering as Brandon was never able to win the affections of Miriam Marsh before departing. His clothes are a deep black and he stares longingly into the distance before boarding; hoping for one last glance of Miriam. That glance never arrives. The most surprising part of this scene, especially compared to early-modern representations of Americans traveling west, is the nature of the stagecoach itself. A handful of men had joined Brandon for the journey but the trunk in the back looks to have little if any supplies. Nowhere near the supplies needed for the long and arduous journey ahead. As Brandon climbs aboard to take his seat the stagecoach sways and shakes. Care was not taken in the props production and it is surprising that it held steady for one scene nevermind a long voyage west. Additionally, the stagecoach was tiny and offered little protection to its inhabitants. It would not fair well in the harsh weather and terrain of the oncoming mountains on the

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<sup>213</sup> *The Iron Horse*, directed by John Ford (1924), 2:14.



horizon. No weapons are depicted to protect the stagecoach from Native American Indian attacks, robbers, marauders, or even stray animals that may attack at night. *The Iron Horse* portrayed the traversal of the continent in a passing manner, paying little attention to the details that artists of the early-modern focused on to produce a sense of danger, hardship, and gall that defined the American spirit. The ruination of time and space, i.e. the immediacy, in travel was so perfectly fitting the modern cultural landscape that had been built with the photographs of Hart and Russell.

“Without cinema, the conquest of the West would have made of the ‘Western stories’ but one minor literature” wrote the modern film critic Andre Bazin.<sup>214</sup> “It is possible that the cinema was the only language capable... of giving [the West] the true aesthetic dimension.”<sup>215</sup> While the historian Paula Marantz Cohen may have countered Bazin about the first part, instead arguing that Western stories were so great as to aid in the success of the cinema, there is no doubt that cinema produced a true ‘aesthetic dimension’ for the West.<sup>216</sup> That aesthetic dimension was one where audiences were transported from Washington D.C., the capital of the nation, to the Western Frontier in a flash. One where the energy and determination that had once built the rugged individualist American identity in the early-modern era had been all but forgotten. The destruction of time and space had been completed by the cinema. The ‘aesthetic dimension’ granted to the West, as the film critic Bazin was so keen on pointing out, was not of westward movement or some greater societal struggle but rather a playground for modern identities where space and time were, as the machine had made them, presented

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<sup>214</sup> Andre Bazin in Paula Marantz Cohen, *Silent Film and the Triumph of the American Myth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pg. 72.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Cohen, pg. 72.

in the same way as they had been in the photographs of the construction of the transcontinental railroad: inconsequential.

### **Institutionalizing the Frontier**

The American nation at the turn of the twentieth century was a rapidly industrializing society undertaking a monumental transformation in the way its institutions operated in relation to its citizens. Monied corporations grew in excess to reshape not only the institutions of work, consumption, and city life but also the democratic and judicial institutions of the American nation and the culture of the American people. Alan Trachtenberg's book *The Incorporation of America* argued that a new 'corporate culture' had a substantial impact "on culture, on values and outlooks, on the 'way of life.'"<sup>217</sup> It reorganized the priorities of a nation and played a role in producing a modern American identity. Trachtenberg's argument is, at its core, a cultural argument in that he is only interested in how politics and economics had adapted as far as they had altered the way in which Americans viewed their world. The representation of the world found in the film *The Iron Horse* fits neatly into Trachtenberg's new 'corporate culture.' As the 'incorporation of America' had produced a modern American culture friendly to industrialization and, in the words of Trachtenberg, "the emergence of a changed, more tightly structured society with new hierarchies of control, and also changed conceptions of that society, of America itself," the cinema had built its worlds in

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<sup>217</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), pg. 3

the same vein.<sup>218</sup> This section will argue that the consumption and content of cinema in general, and the film *The Iron Horse* in particular, in the early twentieth century built a world, both fictional and real, in which the bourgeois power structures of government and capitalism were ever-present celebrating a new, closer relationship between average Americans and hierarchies of control.

The physical space of the cinema played a sizable role immersing Americans in a new consumer culture by revolutionizing the way they consumed culture. “Here we find ourselves today creating and building super-cinemas of enormous capacities, excelling in splendor, in luxury and in furnishings the most palatial homes of princes and crowned kings for and on behalf of His Excellency- the American Citizen” asserted the architect John Eberson in 1929.<sup>219</sup> These movie palaces were extravagant affairs with ornate architectural features often reminding Americans of live theatre.<sup>220</sup> Their appeal did not end at the curb. Inside their walls the cinema introduced bourgeois comforts such as doormen, maids, nurses, ushers, and more all trained with military precision to serve. Newspapers wrote articles that heralded the amenities of these palaces as an experience in their own right.<sup>221</sup> “The surroundings,” according to the historian Maggie Valentine, “created a palpable emotional atmosphere for the movies, extending the fantasy of the film to include the physical environment in which it was viewed.”<sup>222</sup> The magic of the cinema was in how average Americans could partake in a new bourgeois culture of consumption, leisure, and decadence that defined one modern identity. To be more

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid, pg. 3-4.

<sup>219</sup> Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of Movie Theatre* (Yale University Press, 1994), pg. 36.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, pg. 14.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, pg. 37.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

specific, how art was consumed in relation to these activities rather than as the sole domain of the museum or gallery, as it had been in the early-modern, or, at the minimum, consumed at home in newspapers and stereograph machines as it was with the photographs of the construction of the transcontinental railroad. Cinema produced a world where the whole of the experience surrounding cultural consumption was completely in the hands of the bourgeoisie, thereby, transforming these film experiences into, according to the historian Ruth Vasey, “an emissary of consumer culture.”<sup>223</sup> The modern mindset that celebrated capitalism as a mechanism of progress and power in the photographs of Hart and Russell had not only manufactured the cultural works of the cinema but also produced movie palaces where these works were consumed. Culture had not only been commercialized, the consumption of culture had been commercialized and in doing so Americans experienced a world wholly dominated by the structures and institutions of modernity.<sup>224</sup>

As consumers across the nation entered American movie palaces in September, 1924 and concluded with the bourgeois pleasantries, they sat in their plush (probably red) chairs to view John Ford’s *The Iron Horse*. Far from being an accurate documentary, though it touted itself as a “pictorial history” and “accurate and faithful in every particular fact,” its contents and struggles remained thoroughly modern.<sup>225</sup> It reaffirmed the bourgeois pleasantries found in the movie palaces by producing a Western Frontier that was uncharacteristically, at least compared to early-modern painted works,

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<sup>223</sup> Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939*, pg. 4.

<sup>224</sup> For an interesting analysis of ‘art for art’s sake’ versus ‘cultural entrepreneurship’ in the cinema see, Marijke de Valck, “Supporting Art Cinema at a Time of Commercialization: Principles and Practices, the Case of the International Film Festival,” *Poetics*, 42 (2014), pg. 40-59.

<sup>225</sup> *The Iron Horse*, directed by John Ford (1924).

associated with the institutions of the American government and the capitalist society had shaped American culture in the early twentieth century. The film highlighted various institutions and ideas including the executive branch of the government in sanctioning and supporting the transcontinental endeavor through the Pacific Railway Act, the corporate power structures that organized and managed the laborers, camps, and work, American ideas of fairness and justice that pervaded these frontiersmen, and, importantly, the many struggles with apparent capitalistic greed that threatened the whole of the endeavor. Where early-modern painted works sought to build an American spirit of rugged individualism by purposefully omitting institutions of power in their paints, cinema did the opposite. It built on the photographs of the construction of the transcontinental railroad by Alfred A. Hart and Andrew J. Russell to embrace these institutions as a large part of the new American identity, a modern American identity.<sup>226</sup>

John Ford's fondness for Abraham Lincoln, led him to later produce the film *Young Mr. Lincoln* in 1939, positioned Lincoln at the forefront of the transcontinental railroad endeavor.<sup>227</sup> The film takes a detour in the first act to Washington D.C. in 1862 where the institutions of the American government were organizing the fate of the transcontinental railroad. The camera enters the scene as capitalists and military commanders stood around a room of the White House conversing.<sup>228</sup> Seconds later, a stout Lincoln enters the room. All eyes turn to him as he cautiously makes his way through the crowd of people. Everyone bows their heads in respect. A single commander

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<sup>226</sup> In "Chapter II" I come to the conclusion that "the narratives surrounding the construction [of the transcontinental railroad] were of popular moneyed interests, i.e. the structures of the modern bourgeoisie in both the machinery of the railroads and capitalism itself..."

<sup>227</sup> *Young Mr. Lincoln*, directed by John Ford (Twentieth Fox Corporation; 1939).

<sup>228</sup> *The Iron Horse*, directed by John Ford (1924), 0:20.

beckons for Lincoln's attention. As Lincoln lends a single ear, the general hastily asked, "Surely Mr. President, you will not sign this bill for this engineering folly, now that every cent is needed to carry on this [civil] war?"<sup>229</sup> Lincoln turned his head thoughtfully, placed his left hand on the commander's shoulder, and responded mindfully and verbosely, "We must not let problems of war blind us to problems of the peace to come." The camera panned back to Lincoln's earnest face and he finished the response, "Or we will have fought in vain."<sup>230</sup>

After a brief discussion with Miriam Marsh and Peter Jesson, two main characters of the film's narrative, Lincoln was ushered into a second room to sign the Pacific Railway Act into law. Joining him was Thomas Marsh, both Miriam Marsh's father and capitalist invested in the railroad, urging Lincoln to sign the bill. "Mr, President, the whole nation hopes that you will sign that bill" declared Thomas Marsh.<sup>231</sup> Of course, as an investor in the railroad and the one chosen to manage its construction he had a vested interest in the act's passing. Lincoln purposefully lifts his glasses to his face stating "I have decided."<sup>232</sup> As he sits down and begins to flip through the pages of the act Thomas Marsh dips his quill into ink and hands it to Lincoln. Lincoln looks up in a moment of disbelief, obviously added for comedic value, and signs the Act. The film fades to black. The words "The far-seeing wisdom of the great rail-splitter President is the beginning of the Empire of the West" populated the screen above the Presidential Seal.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 0:21.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

This scene is a strange detour. For one, it reads more of a historical reenactment than fiction. It has little to do with the overall narrative of the movie; only including a handful of main characters far from the primary setting. It does not progress the story in a meaningful way and Abraham Lincoln is never seen or mentioned again (except for a brief moment of thankfulness written at the end of the film). Clearly, Lincoln signing the Pacific Railway Act was included in the film because John Ford sought to have documentary elements, the film did hope to be a “pictorial history” after all, and, more importantly, John Ford admired Lincoln enormously.<sup>234</sup> Still, appreciating this scene in the historical and cultural era that produced and consumed it provides an alternate reading. The scene serves to construct a frontier that is heavily influenced by the legislators of Washington D.C and the capitalist class that sought to industrialize the frontier through its close ties with government. The whole of the frontier setting, from this point in the film on, is understood by the viewer as organized by the American government and capitalist class. These powerful governmental and capitalistic institutions that held such sway over the frontier coerced Americans to understand their West as intrinsically linked to strong hierarchies of power, rather than free from powerful interests as it had been understood in early-modern cultural works. Great men now thoughtfully signed acts into law and authored great industrial endeavors rather than building a rugged, individualist American spirit. The future, as John Ford’s Lincoln imagined, was in the transcontinental railroad and the industrial world that it represented.

The influence of the institutions of the American government on the frontier did not end with Lincoln. The film *The Iron Horse* also was keen on depicting a powerful

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

U.S. military as a heroic and peacekeeping force on the frontier. Of course, this had a historical precedent. In an 1873 annual report for his Division of the Missouri Major General Philip Sheridan wrote that the mission of his division was “to give protection to the citizens of the frontier against Indians... to explore unknown territory and furnish escorts to surveying parties for scientific purposes and for projected railroads; to assist and guard the railways already built and other commercial lines of travel; to aid in enforcement of civil law in remote places; and to do generally all that is constantly required of our Army in the way of helping and urging forward everything which tends to develop and increase civilization upon the border...”<sup>235</sup> The historian Robert Wooster argues that not only was the U.S. military fundamental to the American frontier but it acted as “the federal government’s most visible agent of empire.”<sup>236</sup>

The Iron Horse does an exceptional job portraying the U.S. military as fundamental to the frontier and as a “visible agent of empire.”<sup>237</sup> Early in the film, before the viewer is reintroduced to Dave Brandon as an adult, a supply train carrying laborers’ wages is blockaded and attacked by Native American Indians.<sup>238</sup> A cry for help is sent out via a telegram to the U.S. military. Unfortunately, the messenger was shot before finishing the telegram and the location undetermined. When the military finally finds the train they end up burying the bodies of the victims. Toward the end of the film, all the major characters were ensnared in a battle with Native American Indians surrounding a broken down locomotive. The situation was dire. People were dying and others clung to

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<sup>235</sup> Major general Philip Sheridan in Robert Wooster, *American Military Frontiers: The United States Army in the West, 1783-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), pg. 9.

<sup>236</sup> Wooster, pg. 9.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> *The Iron Horse*, directed by John Ford (1924), 0:37.



life with a few weapons in and around a locomotive car. The screen, then, fades to black and the words “like a sweeping wind, the Pawnee scouts rush to the rescue” appear.<sup>239</sup>

The Pawnee Scouts arrive riding through the scene on horseback instantly driving off the Native American Indian threat. While the Pawnee are Native American Indians themselves, they were paid by the U.S. military, according to the film, to protect the workers and, therefore, acted as an extension of the U.S. military arm in the frontier. The characters stand up and cheer their saviors. The representation of the military as the police force of the frontier is only surprising when we consider how cultural perceptions of the West had changed since the early-modern. The fact that the presence of the military is acknowledged but more importantly celebrated in the cultural imagination of the West is a modern reimagining of a land once imagined to be devoid of all powerful institutions.

The second persuasive institution that was celebrated in *The Iron Horse* is the machinery of capitalism; in the institutions of work, industrialization, and hierarchies of control and in the literal machines that populated this new form of work. Comparable to the photography of the transcontinental railroad, the film centered the locomotive and railroad tracks. The locomotive acts as a safeplace for the laborers of the transcontinental railroad and as a metric of progress for their bosses. The film acknowledges that the town arising from the mass of workers laboring on the tracks moves whenever the locomotive has progressed a certain distance away. “It’s reign as capital of the Union pacific is over-another night and it will be deserted- with its inhabitants building a new city in distant Cheyenne,” reads the text on the film.<sup>240</sup> The next scene is is a busy day at the temporary

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid. 2:06.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, 1:08.

city as everyone works to disassemble anything not bolted down and put everything on the locomotive. Wyoming bound they were. It's not a sad scene, however. Men drink, people are hopeful for the future, the local bartender states, "Boys, this bat of justice and likker will still function when we get to Cheyenne- let 'er go!." <sup>241</sup> As the locomotive departs their old town the crowd gathers on the cars to sing, dance, drink, and be merry. The final text on the screen whispers "and not even a dog remains." <sup>242</sup> This scene is important because it presents the locomotive not only as a tool of industrial development or the spread of civilization, though it definitely does show how American institutions and comforts tend to arise in its path. But it also shows how Americans had trusted it to ensure a livelihood for their families. That trust is a core institution of capitalism and was understood by Americans of the early twentieth century who, by and large, worked in industry as a means to support their families.

The way in which Americans employed the locomotive of *The Iron Horse* to relate to the characters of the film is relevant again towards the end of the film. When laborers of the Union Pacific are surrounded by native American Indian attackers, they take refuge in their broken down locomotive. A call for help goes out to camp and Thomas Marsh and Dave Brandon rally the rest of the laborers to pick up arms and prepare to enter the fray. Though some workers refuse, insisting that soldiers be sent, they are eventually forced onto the train by, in a surprising twist, Buffalo Bill as he returns with cattle from his adventures. Miriam Marsh picks up a rifle and the locomotive leaves to save their fellow workingmen. In this instance, the locomotive was portrayed as both a safe place from Native American Indian attacks and as a savior for the men who

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 1:09.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid. 1:12.

were pinned down. The surprising and various ways that this film portrayed the locomotive as more than just a machine but as magnet for civilization, creator of modern comforts, protector, and savior ingrained a version of the West where the locomotive guided the American people and a new identity where the institutions of capitalism played a large role in guiding the daily lives of average Americans.

*The Iron Horse* produced a fictional world that embraced powerful institutions of the modern world in the setting of the Western Frontier. Cinema did the same for the very real setting of the movie palaces. From the second Americans entered their movie palaces they were bombarded with a sort of propaganda that coerced them to understand the modern world and its modern comforts, i.e. bourgeois comforts, as progress. The movie palaces permitted Americans to experience life as a member of the bourgeois through material comforts and the films themselves created a setting that was wholly modern in nature. In *The Iron Horse*, both governmental and capitalist institutions were not only persuasive in a setting once considered devoid of all power but celebrated for their role in the lives of Americans. Strong lawmakers and policy shapers, a military that extended its influence throughout the continent, and capitalist ideologies of machines, hierarchies of control, and work that reshaped Americans notions of the world all through a frontier setting permitted Americans to reimagine their frontier. No longer was the frontier a setting to build an early-modern identity but rather it was the playground of the modern ideology. Its reimagined characteristics aided industrial development over the rest of the nation.

## A Challenger Approaches

In the film *The Iron Horse* the main protagonist, Dave Brandon, is faced with scheming capitalists, labor strife, a woman whose modern sensibilities abhors violence even in cases where it is morally acceptable, powerful governmental institutions like the military that dealt with violent natives, and the presence of a capitalistic railroad endeavor that slowly transformed the West from a place of renegades and wildernesses to frontier metropolises of law, order, and democracy. Brandon's struggle throughout the movie was a metaphor for the struggles of a changing society, of a people facing a vast cultural, economic, and political transformation and abandoning old notions of aristocratic honor, ideas of self-sufficiency and self-reliance, and the wielding of violence to maintain the social order to adopt more modern cultural norms and sensibilities.<sup>243</sup>

Dave Brandon is that early-modern folk hero, a relic of a foregone era, that when positioned within the modern world is forced to reimagine his place. Americans could sympathize with Brandon, employ his struggle to better understand their own struggle with the vast transformation that had occurred in American society, but ultimately, as Brandon had done, embrace modernity. His challenge was fleeting and the lesson of the film portrayed a world where accepting modern sensibilities, work habits, etc. was more productive than remaining a tragic relic of a violent past. Antithetical to the photography of the construction of the transcontinental railroad, the cinema did question modernity by presenting the early-modern hero, if only fleetingly.

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<sup>243</sup> Some historians understand Westerns as a "reflection on the possibility of modern, bourgeois domestic societies to sustain themselves, command allegiance and sacrifice, defend themselves from enemies, inspire admiration and loyalty... See Robert B. Pippin, *Hollywood Westerns and American Myth: The Importance of Howard Hawks and John Ford for Political Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pg. 24.

Dave Brandon as the protagonist of the film contains certain literary qualities. He drives the plot forward, undergoes the biggest transformation of all characters, and is the point-of-view through which the film is told to the audience.<sup>244</sup> The responsibility of the main character in literature and film, however, is more complicated than just progressing a plot. The success of the film in impacting its audience often relies entirely on the main character.<sup>245</sup> An unappealing main character can spell doom for any story. In this sense, when we view Dave Brandon, we must view his characterization as familiar to audiences. His transformation, then, familiar as well. Dave Brandon was someone early twentieth century Americans understood, his struggles were struggles that were relatively common, and his transformation and conclusion were not only understandable but appreciated in giving audiences closure. In that sense, with an analytical mind, I will observe multiple points of the story surrounding Dave Brandon's actions. I will start with the audiences first impression, the reaction of others in the film to him, and finally his transformation. What I found is that Dave Brandon is presented as an ideal early-modern frontiersman who grows to settle into the new modern industrialization that has befallen the Western Frontier. While audiences may not have been early-modern frontiersmen themselves, they would have either idealized them or experienced a culture that celebrated them. Viewing the trope of the American cowboy as tragic in nature allowed these early-modern heroes to remain as heroes but not a hero one aspires to be, rather a hero of what once was.

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<sup>244</sup> Paul Kooperman, *Writing Short Film Scripts: A Student Guide to Film-Making* (Australia: Insight, 2009), pg. 12.

<sup>245</sup> Wells Earl Draughon, *Advanced Writing: Fiction and Film* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2003) pg. 108.

The film established Dave Brandon as an early-modern frontier hero through his childhood and adolescent experiences. The audience is first introduced to Brandon at a very young age alongside his father, Miriam Marsh, her father Thomas Marsh, and Abraham Lincoln as a young man. The first few scenes, the prologue of the film, focused on Brandon's father and his dream of a transcontinental railroad. He was tall and dirty. His clothes were rough and worn. His skin tough and mustache overgrown. He smoked a pipe as he leaned against a tree with his eyes gazing off into the distance. Thomas Marsh enters the scene and the comparison is obvious. Marsh was in a fine black suit and his skin and hair perfectly clean. Marsh was introduced as a "contractor," no doubt a member of the petty bourgeoisie at this time. Brandon's father decided to head West from their settlement in Springfield, Illinois to survey the path ahead for a transcontinental railroad. Brandon's father tells Thomas Marsh, "Yes, Tom- dreaming of the rails that'll reclaim that wilderness out there clean to California."<sup>246</sup> Though Marsh looks unamused the scene fades to black and text informs the readers that they were "impelled westward by the strong urge of progress."<sup>247</sup> After a depressing goodbye between Miriam Marsh and Dave Brandon, young children at the time but seemed destined to fall in love, Thomas Marsh turned to Lincoln skeptically, saying, "Poor dreamer- he's chasing a rainbow!"<sup>248</sup> Lincoln responds, "Yes, Tom- and some day men like you will be laying rails along that rainbow."<sup>249</sup> Ironically proven correct later in the film. As Dave Brandon and his father were resting at a campfire deep in the frontier, a faint sound in the distance prompts suspicion. Dave Brandon is told to hide in a nearby bush when a renegade and his Native

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<sup>246</sup> *The Iron Horse*, directed by John Ford (1924), 0:03.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*, 0:07.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid*, 0:09.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid*.

American Indian accomplices surround their campfire. Dave Brandon's father is brutally murdered in front of the young boy's eyes. Once the group of men retreat, Dave Brandon is left holding the body of his father in his arms.

Through Dave Brandon's experiences as a child, absence during adolescence, and return as a young adult his qualities are revealed, many of which not only produce the archetype of an early-modern hero but also of an Epic hero. "The standard characterization of an Epic hero are these: he usually has a mysterious past, is in search of an ideal, and is driven by fate toward an inevitable end," according to some film critics.<sup>250</sup> Brandon fits all these criteria. He leaves home as a child to travel West, faces tragedy, and is never seen again by audiences until he is a young adult. He returns to finish his father's dream of a railroad spanning the continent. A string of coincidences, or an inevitable fate to some, had coerced him to stay with the railroad until its completion. Likewise, these characteristics of an Epic hero seem to define many early-modern heroes. Often those traveling West were in search of an ideal and believed they and others were driven by divine providence. While Brandon fits neatly into the categories of early-modern and Epic hero, the problems of the film arose when he encountered a modern world that challenged his core beliefs and qualities.

No-where is it more clear that Dave Brandon is an early-modern hero encountering the modern world than with his interactions with Miriam Marsh. Miriam Marsh is the daughter of Thomas Marsh, the head of the Union Pacific construction effort, and fiancée to Peter Jesson, an engineer working under her father. More importantly, she was the ideal example of the 'new woman' that, according to the

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<sup>250</sup> See Kevin Gough-Yates in Frank Manchel, *Film Study: An Analytical Bibliography, Volume I* (Rutherford; Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), pg. 806.

historian Lynn Dumenil, was a “telling marker, a symbol, of modernity itself.”<sup>251</sup>

Dumenil explains that the characteristics of the ‘modern woman’ included entry in the professional world, increased college admissions, and a new mode of dress that was significantly less restrictive and bulky than the older Victorian garments. She continues to argue that the ‘new woman’ of the 1890s “had begun to shed traditional notions that their place was exclusively in the home... pushing the boundaries of the traditional sphere.”<sup>252</sup> While Miriam Marsh was a character of the 1870s, twenty years before Dumenil argues that the ‘new woman’ begun to appear, her character was a product of the 1920s that had produced and consumed her. She is depicted outside the traditional sphere of family and not only present in a male dominated construction site but useful to the railroad enterprise. “Men, this great work depends on you- for the sake of your country, I ask you to finish it- make the whole Nation proud of you,” begged Miriam Marsh of striking workers.<sup>253</sup> Her eloquent speaking skills, a representation of the increased role of women in politics through volunteer organizations, rallied the striking men back to work, ending the labor crisis.<sup>254</sup> Later in the film, when laborers were under attack by Native American Indians, the women of the saloon rush out to stand alongside Miriam Marsh, rifles in hand, to defend them and their work of the railroad.<sup>255</sup> The Iron Horse depicts Miriam Marsh and the other women accompanying the construction of the transcontinental railroad as independent, elegant speakers, and completely outside the

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<sup>251</sup> Lynn Dumenil, *Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), pg. 98.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, pg. 99.

<sup>253</sup> *The Iron Horse*, directed by John Ford (1924), 0:43.

<sup>254</sup> According to Lynn Dumenil, “through their voluntary associations, these [new] women had become political actors, lobbying for progressive reform legislation such as factory and child labor laws, prohibition, and urban reforms” Dumenil, pg. 99.

<sup>255</sup> *The Iron Horse*, directed by John Ford (1924), 1:57.



traditional sphere of the home, all qualities that Lynn Dumenil had assigned to the ‘new woman’ of the 1920s.

Miriam Marsh’s ‘new womanhood’ comes into direct conflict with Dave Brandon’s early-modern beliefs and qualities when she urges him not to retaliate violently after her fiancé, Peter Jesson, attempts to murder him. Upon Dave Brandon’s return to camp, and from the dead after Jesson had revealed to everyone he had died, his friends said “there’s gonna be a foight.”<sup>256</sup> Miriam, happily noticing that Brandon survived, is forced to break up a fight between Brandon and Jesson, later telling Brandon, “I sent for you, Davy, because I heard there was to be a fight- promise me you won’t have any trouble with Mr. Jesson.”<sup>257</sup> He leaves his gun with Miriam and apologizes. Recognizing his kindness, she professes her love for him. Still, he leaves her and enters the saloon where Jesson pulls a gun ready to shoot Brandon. The ensuing fight leaves Jesson in an incapacitated state, though it was rather unclear if Brandon had actually killed him or just knocked him unconsciousness. Miriam, disappointed in Brandon, said, “You promised me- and you’ve broken -your- word.”<sup>258</sup> She leaves the scene and his life. The disagreement between Miriam Marsh and Dave Brandon over the use of violence to solve problems is a great representation of the crash of early-modern and modern cultural beliefs. Early-modern cultural works were keen on removing the influence of grand institutions and part of the American spirit was a belief that men were to defend their own honor, lives, and sense of justice through violence. The modern world, on the other hand,

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 1:28.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 1:36.

being represented by powerful institutions, had the court systems, police, and powerful government to keep the peace without the need for men to do it themselves.

This notion that violence is the wrong way to handle disputes in the new, modern world is the foundation of Dave Brandon's transformation. During the Native American Indian attack on the stopped locomotive toward the end of the film, Brandon finds Deroux nearby with a rifle. Deroux, of course, is the architect of Jesson's many attempted murders on Brandon. For whatever reason, both Deroux and Brandon dropped their guns. Brandon tackled Deroux to the ground. They swung their fists madly, grappled on the ground, and throw each other side-to-side. By the end of the fight they both end up shirtless. Deroux looks up weary-eyed from the dirt below and puts his two-fingered hand around a weapon. Brandon finally coming to the realization that Deroux is his father's murderer dodges the pickaxe, climbs on top of Deroux, and chokes him to death while the U.S. military stampedes through the background.

Brandon is not victorious. Sure, he has killed his mortal enemy Deroux and saved the railroad but his reaction to Deroux's death was not one of a victorious soldier cheering with his unit or of a boxer with his right hand raised by the referee as they prance around the arena. The lawless violence that Brandon participated in was more reminiscent of the early-modern world in which Brandon's father was killed in than the modern world that Brandon now participated in. The modern world had a powerful U.S. military patrolling the frontier, courts, and a democratic process of which Brandon did not participate in to deliver justice. Rightfully so, Brandon is portrayed as distraught when Thomas Marsh approaches. His face is twisted and contorted and he refuses to go near the body of Deroux. He looks straight down in the dirt while Marsh attempts to

console him. Brandon's reaction to Deroux's evilness would have been a complicated matter for Americans of the twentieth century. Anyone would root for Brandon. He is the hero of the story. Yet, his victory is supposed to be understood as tragic because he is not the cheerful victor but rather depressed about his use of violence. His victory remains outside the powerful institutions that govern law, order, and justice in the modern world. Brandon's actions remind viewers that the early-modern hero is tragic because he refused to live in the world as it is, as Americans of the early-twentieth century understand it, rather resorting to the early-modern violence that scared modern men. Scared Brandon himself.

Dave Brandon's character remains a fascinating challenge to modernity. He is a frontiersman, an Epic hero, and began the movie firmly as an ideal representation of early-modern beliefs. Yet, his struggles are with a wholly modern world that he was unprepared for. Scheming capitalists, labor strife, the 'new woman,' and a railroad that threatened his early-modern world with powerful institutions now populated his frontier. Audiences witnessed Brandon as a child in a world much different than the one he returns to as an adult. Through his time with the railroad, he transforms from the early-modern Epic hero to, eventually, a common laborer on the transcontinental railroad in pursuit of a more modern goal. The end of the film has Dave Brandon head West as a supervisor on the Central Pacific Railroad, later idealizing its completion alongside Miriam Marsh. While his challenge to modernity is fascinating, it was nonetheless fleeting. He was incorporated into the undertaking of the transcontinental railroad and with it the greater culture of modernity that valued work and the hierarchies that accompanied it. Through Dave Brandon's character audiences grappled with the modern world that had come to

dominate their lives and, like Brandon, accept it. Film was more prepared to question the tenants of modernity than the photographs of the construction of the transcontinental railroad but the end result was the same. Modernity had won.

## Conclusion

It is clear that the *The Iron Horse* built a cinematic world around the photography of the construction of the transcontinental railroad in that it depicted a Western Frontier wholly dominated by American institutions and traversed effortlessly by individuals. The early-modern vision of a world that moves inevitably westward, accepted the difficulty of the traversal of time and space, heroized the human agency of frontiersmen and settlers as agents of progress, and underscored the experience of progress with a divine interpretation had been completely and utterly lost. Still, *The Iron Horse* was not merely modern propaganda and did not mimic the experience of the Hart and Russell photographs perfectly. The film complicated the issue of modernity by choosing an early-modern frontiersmen as its protagonist and exploring his relationship with the burgeoning modernity. His story was tragic in nature as it is his reluctance to accept modern values that causes many conflicts within the film and, therefore, his challenge was often viewed as a failure by modern audiences. But it is in this challenge that we can understand American society as itself reluctant to accept modernity. The last half of the nineteenth century, as modern industrialization had taken over the way of life for millions of Americans, Americans also witnessed enormous labor strife. Americans were weary of the new world they found themselves inhabiting and *The Iron Horse* provided a small way for them to grapple with it, challenge it, but, ultimately, accept modernity.

## Conclusion:

“Science Finds, Industry Applies, Man Conforms”



Advertisement for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair: A Century of Progress by Glen Sheffer.

Antithetical to the poster advertising for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair: Columbian Exposition that included symbols of America's early-modern frontier past overlooking America's industrial future, the poster advertisement for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair: A Century of Progress was only concerned with the modern metropolis as a means to a future utopia.<sup>259</sup> The poster concentrated on a woman clothed in a metal breastplate, an eagle-shaped crown, and a long flowing skirt standing over a globe spun to the Western Hemisphere. Her one foot draped over the American continent and arms outstretched as if gifting the future to the American people. At her sides existed two stone men, one working a machine and the other a chemistry set, their allegorical nature a symbol of mankind's progress in the sciences, arts, and industries. Behind them were towering skyscrapers of the modern metropolis, brilliant spotlights, and innovative aircraft that, metaphorically speaking, had erupted from their work. The poster perfectly encapsulated the fair's unofficial motto; "Science Finds, Industry Applies, Man Conforms."<sup>260</sup> It did not, however, incorporate the symbolism of the early-modern in its historical progress from man to the towering modern metropolis. No, its version of progress was solely defined in a modern way, concentrated on industry as the quintessential object of historical progression.

The disparate nature in the advertising campaign for the 1893 and 1933 Chicago World's Fairs is evidence of a staggering shift in the culture of the American people. By

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<sup>259</sup> For the 1892 poster, see *Chicago of to-day. The Metropolis of the West. The nation's choice for the World's Columbian Exposition... 1891*, published by Acme Publishing and Engraving Co., 1891. Americana Collection at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Accessed August 15, 2017; For the 1933 poster, see Glen C. Sheffer, *World's Fair, Chicago. A Century of Progress, 1833-1933* / Sheffer, published by Chicago : Goes Litho. Co., 1933. Library of Congress. Accessed December 10, 2017.

<sup>260</sup> Robert W. Rydell, "Century of Progress Exposition," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, accessed December 10, 2017, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/225.html>.

1933, the American identity had transformed so drastically that Americans no longer acknowledged the bygone societal goal of ‘civilizing’ America’s Western Frontier to ensure a pastoral and agricultural paradise. Chicago was no longer a “metropolis of the West” just a thriving metropolis of America’s industrial heartland. Even in the midst of one of the greatest failures of capitalism, the Great Depression, Americans of the early twentieth century envisioned a future of industrial development and consumerism, never once doubting their societies transformation.<sup>261</sup>

This thesis has tracked the development of the American visual culture from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century to argue that the photography of the construction of the transcontinental railroad played a substantial role in its transformation, a transformation defined by a newfound reliance on industrial capitalism, machines, and the new relationships of production that these improvements begot. The reason why photography in particular was perfectly suited for this task is its unique ability as a machine to envision a future disparate from the tenants of Manifest Destiny that dominated the early-modern visual culture and toward the notion of progress found in industrial development. Through an analysis of the form, function, and style of various visual artifacts from early-modern and modern American artists, including photography and film, this thesis concluded that not only did a transformation in the visual culture occur because of the photography of the transcontinental road but it is evidence of a greater cultural revolution in the American identity that now championed industry and became the backbone of American industrial dominance in the twentieth century.

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

“Chapter I: The Final Frontier” set out to establish how artists of the early-modern period portrayed their frontier through the guise of Manifest Destiny. These early-modern visual cultural works established a world where settlers advanced inexplicably westward toward a frontier line that marked- at least in the minds of many Americans- where ‘savagery’ met ‘civilization,’ heroized the frontiersmen and settler as agents of progress and authors of a rugged individualist American identity, spurned the powerful institutions that made western settlement possible, and justified such conquest through a divine and humanitarian foundation. These early-modern cultural works imagined the West as key to an agricultural and pastoral future.

In the 1870s, as “Chapter II: Manufacturing a New Reality on the Transcontinental Railroad” argued, the photography of the construction of the transcontinental railroad that was disseminated across the American nation was distinct in form, function, and style from the early-modern painted works. These photographs reimagined America’s Western Frontier as the key to a more modern, industrial future by producing a directionally chaotic world rather than one founded on an east-to-west paradigm, celebrating the locomotive in the frontier as an agent of progress and incontrovertible change, valuing powerful governmental and capitalist institutions, depicting the immediacy of the world rather than a struggling people traversing the continent through both space and time, ignoring the feats and hardwork of labor in the construction efforts, and producing a new role for Native American Indians who were no longer the receipts of civilization but rather ranked lower on a ‘civilized scale.’ These photographs celebrated industry and capitalism, now envisioning the future of America through the lens of industrial development. As Americans had for generations based their



agriculture and pastoral future on a Western Frontier guided by Manifest Destiny, American cultural producers of the late nineteenth century now relied on a new understanding of their West to guide a vision of the future that backed industrial development as the path to utopia.

“Chapter III: The Moving Picture, the Western, and *The Iron Horse*” reaffirmed the modern world Americans had imagined through the photographs of the construction of the transcontinental railroad. Through an analysis of John Ford’s 1924 film *The Iron Horse* it is clear that Americans produced and consumed a visual culture that painted the world as wholly dominated by the powerful institutions of government and capitalism. A world where traversal of the continent was, as the railroad had made it, inconsequential. Still, *The Iron Horse* is fascinating in that it often provided a challenge to modernity through its reliance on an early-modern epic hero. Dave Brandon, the protagonist of the film, often faced difficulties as he encountered the modern world. His reliance on rugged individualism and the use of violence to solve problems produced many of the struggles that he faced throughout the film. Americans at the time found solace in such a character because they too were faced with the challenges of the modern world. Still, Dave Brandon only provided a brief and fleeting challenge to modernity. He was to be seen as a tragic character and his stubbornness a determinant to his advancement. Americans employed Brandon and other protagonists like him to grapple with modernity, challenge its tenants, but, ultimately, accept modernity as the future of the American nation.

The historian Robert W. Rydell argued that the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair: A Century of Progress was but one example of a group of postwar fairs organized by government officials, intellectuals, and industrialists that, in the wake of the devastation

of the First World War, “turned to the world’s fair medium for buttressing their own authority and for giving ordinary citizens direction through the turbulent seas of the postwar period.”<sup>262</sup> The method through which those bourgeois power structures achieved these goals was to press the view that “progress rides on the swell of technological innovation... limit[ing] humankind’s role in world progress to consumerism.”<sup>263</sup> People loved it. One fairgoer recalled saving a pittance every week for the opportunity to leisure at the fair.<sup>264</sup> The American novelist and writer Brock Brower recollected the fairs of his childhood as a setting for much of his education. He stated, “During Art, we spent hours trying to carve the Trylon and Perisphere... During Arithmetic, we drew them on the plane as triangles and circles. And I hate to think how hopeless we would’ve been in Geography without the Lagoon of Nations.”<sup>265</sup> Fairgoers leaving the 1939 New York World’s Fair gleefully wore buttons that read “I have seen the future.”<sup>266</sup> The purpose of this thesis is to explore how a nation so preoccupied for the first century of its existence with the early-modern notions of an agricultural and pastoral utopia guided by a divine mission to explore and settle its western lands could so effectively transform its cultural narrative to not only indulge in the industrialization of their nation but envision their future through a manufacturing lens and their utopia through consumerism. Through an analysis of the visual culture surrounding the Western Frontier, it is obvious that the way cultural producers imagined America’s West

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<sup>262</sup> Robert W. Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century of Progress Expositions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pg. 5.

<sup>263</sup> Cheryl R. Ganz, *The 1933 Chicago World’s Fair: A Century of Progress* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), pg. 3.

<sup>264</sup> “My girlfriend and I were thrilled at each visit and you put that into your book” recalled a fairgoer. Rydell, pg. 2.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

transformed alongside the political and economic changes of the American nation, playing a role in the new way average Americans viewed themselves, their nation, and their futures.

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