

Creating the American West in Art

The American West has long been a dynamic place of cultural exchange and artistic production, throughout thousands of years of precolonial Indigenous presence, the period of Spanish exploration and conquest in the mid-1600s, and modern times. When Euro-American artists first visited the region during the 1800s, they marveled at its ancient landscapes and myriad civilizations. Paintings and sculptures from the Petrie Institute of Western American Art at the Denver Art Museum reveal this creative interest in the region during the United States' westward expansion and into the mid-20th century. Most of the artists represented here spent years studying in Europe—predominantly Italy, Germany, and France. They returned to the United States, however, determined to distinguish themselves through uniquely American subjects. Their combination of closely observed detail and creative license in the resulting works reveal an array of aesthetic approaches. Regardless of style, some depictions helped foster a Euro-American identity rooted in a pioneering spirit of adventure and opportunity, which ultimately led to a doctrine of manifest destiny and the myth of American exceptionalism. This exhibition encourages viewers to explore the nuances of a complex American West, including both its challenging history—especially regarding the involuntary displacement of Native Americans—and its vibrant and diverse natural beauty.

The Frist Art Museum engaged with many Indigenous people during our fall 2019 presentation of Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists. Because Indigenous figures and culture are represented in works of art made by Euro-American artists in this exhibition, we invited several of our advisers to offer their perspectives on what is depicted. In foregrounding Indigenous voices, we hope to offer a more inclusive narrative for our guests.

The Frist Art Museum's building sits on land that Cherokee and Shawnee Native peoples and elders call their homeland. We acknowledge and pay respect to them. We also acknowledge and offer deep gratitude to the ancestral land and water that support us.



Henry Kirke Brown (American, 1814–1886)

The Choosing of the Arrow, 1849

Bronze

Denver Art Museum: Funds from Mrs. Hayes Lyon, Cyril Farny, Helen Dill bequest, an anonymous bequest, and other donors, by exchange, 1996.³²

This was one of the first bronze sculptures to be cast in the United States, and it heralded what would become a rich tradition of capturing western American subjects in the material. Traveling to Michigan's Mackinac Island, on Lake Huron, Henry Kirke Brown was among the earliest Euro-American sculptors to observe Indigenous peoples firsthand. The graceful pose of this idealized young man is very similar to ancient Greek and Italian Renaissance sculpture, which Brown would have seen when he studied in Rome and Florence. The figure is captured in contrapposto, his weight shifted on one foot and his hips tilted. Only the bow, quiver, and arrows suggest that the figure is Indigenous.



Charles Bird King (American, 1785–1862)

Hayne Hudjihini (Eagle of Delight), ca. 1822

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.462

After the American Revolution, US government policy, growing industry, and economic opportunities drew migrating settlers westward. By 1845, the ideology (and terminology) of manifest destiny—that white Americans had divine justification to expand across and settle the continent—was established. Underlying the optimism of this doctrine was inexorable conflict with Indigenous people, whose tribal lands and sovereignty were increasingly under threat. Governmental responses ranged from negotiation to armed conflict and intentional disease transmission. Officials sometimes hosted delegations of Indigenous leaders in Washington, DC, hoping both to build relationships and to intimidate. Artists were commissioned to make portraits of these visitors, including this Great Plains woman, the wife of an Otoe leader.

Kennetha Greenwood (Otoe-Missouria) and America Meredith (Cherokee Nation):

Hayne Hudjihini (*Eagle of Delight*), the youngest of the five wives of Otoe Chief Sų Manyi Kathi (Prairie Wolf), accompanied a delegation to Washington, DC, to meet President James Monroe in 1821. Before the couple's 1822 return to Nebraska, Charles Bird King painted portraits of her and her husband. Formal portraits of Native American women were rare during this era, so fortunately King painted several versions. Most have a dark background, but this version stands out with its evening sky with a hint of foliage.

The Otoe (Jiwere, "Those Who Arrived"), Missouria (Nut'achi, "Died in the Water"), and Ioway all split from the Ho-Chunk near the Great Lakes in the 16th century. By the 18th century's end, the Missouria rejoined the Otoe, who were successful traders along the Missouri River. Although these tribes were patriarchal, Otoe-Missouria women enjoyed more rights and freedoms than their European counterparts.

Born around 1792, Hayne Hudjihini was a chief's daughter, and her attire reflects her family's wealth. Her imported dress follows European fashion. Strands of white shells strung with black seed beads are threaded along her earlobes. Silver jewelry, such as her bracelet, continues to be worn by Otoe women, as do layers of beaded necklaces. The red mineral paint on her hair and hairline embodies a prayer for protection. Otoe women still wear red face paint for formal occasions.

Tragically, Hayne Hudjihini died from measles shortly after her return home, but her descendants are prominent citizens of the Otoe-Missouria Tribe today.



Westward Curiosity

During the early to mid-1800s, intrepid artist-explorers, some of whom were hired by US government-funded expeditions, journeyed into the American West. These Euro-American artists faced difficult journeys over rough terrain. They carried minimal supplies, such as notebooks and drawing or watercolor materials, and made *plein air* (outdoor) studies. They used these sketches as references to create larger and often dramatized paintings upon their return east. Tasked with recreating the factual details of the land, they were also challenged to capture the experience of the West—the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains, the vastness of the plains, and the unfamiliar forms of bison—within the limited space of a painted canvas. Such works, widely disseminated as prints and as illustrations in newspapers, proved popular to eastern and international audiences and established many symbols of the American West that remain current today.

Euro-American settlers followed these early artist-explorers west in search of opportunity and land, resulting in both greater cultural exchange and significant tensions with the Indigenous peoples who had lived there for centuries.



Alfred Jacob Miller (American, 1810–1874)

Shoshone Indians at a Mountain Lake (Lake Fremont), 1860–70

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Exchange and purchase from Erich Kohlberg, 1961.25

Alfred Jacob Miller trained in Paris and Italy and, in 1837, was one of the earliest Euro-American artists to journey into the American West. This painting of the Wind River mountains in Wyoming features the theatrical composition and sensitive color of European Romanticism, which emphasized stimulating a viewer's emotional response to a subject. When he returned to his studio on the East Coast, Miller would depict from memory a West that is peaceful and beautiful: an emerald-green lake from which several Shoshone water their horses surrounded by lush banks and purple mountains.



William Jacob Hays (American, 1830–1875)

Herd of Buffalo, 1862

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Funds from Fred E. Gates, 1960.39

A dozen bison mingle within a thick haze in this painting by William Jacob Hays, a noted naturalist. It is unclear whether this mysterious atmosphere is caused by a morning fog or the dusty soil of the prairie, kicked up by the herd. Hays records the physical characteristics of this uniquely American animal by painting it from twelve different angles. The silhouette of the immense bison in the foreground contrasts with the warmth of the light, dancing with the particles of dust or fog.



James Walker (American, born in England, 1819–1889)

Cowboys Roping a Bear, ca. 1877

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Funds from Fred E. Gates, 1955.87

After a career as a military illustrator and painter, James Walker moved to California. Fascinated by the legacy of the Spanish, who first explored the area in the 1600s, Walker turned his attention from battle scenes to Spanish American ranch life. Roping bears was undertaken for sport as well as to manage predator populations. Here, Walker has tempered a violent and difficult subject with smoothly choreographed lines and the rhythm of undulating circles.

Chelsea Kaiah (Uncompahgre Ute and White Mountain Apache):

While James Walker wanted to preserve the vaqueros' mastery of riding a horse and roping, it's important to realize the consequences of protecting and claiming land for the sake of cattle farming. In this painting, made around 1877, the vaqueros are roping a California grizzly; a decade later, in 1889, the California grizzly would be on the brink of extinction. Sadly, in the early 1900s, it would be officially extinct. Simultaneously, buffaloes nearly met extinction in 1889 as they competed with cattle for land.

To this day, there are debates on reintroducing grizzlies to the California ecosystem. The main concern is often that the coexistence of bears and humans would not be safe. But the coexistence of bears and humans is part of long-standing beliefs and traditions in Native tribes.

The Ute tribe has a springtime celebration called the Bear Dance—it celebrates the end of winter. A wooden instrument mimics the scratching of a bear. Like a lot of Native dancing, the Bear Dance copies a certain animal's movements while paying respect to it. The dance is a culturally important event that connects the Ute bands in Utah and southern Colorado.

Grizzlies are ecologically important to the American landscape, just as Native people are. There needs to be action and acknowledgment that it is important both for Native people and for the animals we celebrate to have rights to our ancestral homelands.

Rose B. Simpson (Santa Clara Pueblo):

Every day I am enraged as I stand in the crumbling wake of the front lines of colonialism/patriarchy. I don't know anyone who hasn't been directly affected by or hasn't somehow internalized those systems. I know I have.

My life's work is wondering *why*.

What makes someone capable of inflicting pain on another being?

I know full well that I am that bear being roped in the dust, rigid in fear. I also cannot deny that I am also those men with lassos in hands, commanding those panicked horses with heartless, entitled dominance. The bear represents my justified rage, my natural instinct like the one that comes from mothering.

But maybe those men are reflecting my denied fear, pompous and blundering. Maybe the heartless men are a mirror of my denied self-love—denied to the point that they hold the key to rape and pillage myself and all that I love.

This work of art is important as an honest iteration of a time—a time when there was pride in this ugly behavior. But wait, is it over?

This piece offers the opportunity to see our own internal workings, the ones where we have allowed all this suffering to happen, where we are all held accountable to the terrified bear within us all. Cut the ropes, let her scratch. Let her roar. She is angry, and rightfully so.



John Quincy Adams Ward (American, 1830–1910)

Indian Hunter, modeled 1860, cast ca. 1885

Bronze

Denver Art Museum: Funds from 2009 Collectors' Choice in honor of Lewis I. Sharp and the Mabel Y. Hughes Charitable Trust, 2009.796

John Quincy Adams Ward identified his subjects as Native Americans more clearly than his teacher Henry Kirke Brown, whose sculpture *The Choosing of the Arrow* is on view at the entrance of the exhibition. In this bronze and *Indian Chief* nearby, attire and accessories such as buffalo robes, buckskin, a feather headdress, and a canine hunting helper are signifiers of Indigenous cultures.



John Quincy Adams Ward (American, 1830–1910)

Indian Chief, ca. 1860

Bronze

Denver Art Museum: Gift from Estelle Rae Wolf and the Harry I. and Edythe Smookler Memorial Endowment Fund in honor of Lewis I. Sharp, 2001.634

The powerful physiques of some Native American men rendered them, to Euro-American eyes, comparable to classical Greek and Roman statuary, as seen in this upright figure. Such idealization, however, disguised the realities of cultural and political differences between tribes. Instead, it presented a symbol of the paradoxical "noble savage," a poetic figure living in close communion with nature who, by virtue of such natural purity, was considered unfit to exist in the modern white man's world.



John Mix Stanley (American, 1814–1872)

Group of Piegan Indians, 1867

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Denver Public Library, Western History Department, 34.2008



The West as Future

During the Civil War years of the early 1860s, artistic depictions of magnificent western landscapes contrasted sharply with photographs of battlefield carnage. Paintings like those on display here presented hope for healing in the nation's pristine wilderness and contributed to conservation movements that would lead to the formation of national parks. American artists, many returned from studies in Europe, went in search of uniquely American subjects. In this quest, some New York City-based artists associated with the Hudson River School—a group devoted to the beautiful and fearsome in nature—turned to western landscapes. In so doing, they presented a vision of the nation that could rival anything produced in Europe, and contributed to the idea that humanity's relationship to nature profoundly informed American identity.

Captivated by these visions of grandeur and encouraged by such US government policies as the 1862 Homestead Act, many people moved westward for economic opportunity, religious freedom, and personal growth. This migration impacted intercultural relationships, sometimes worsening existing intertribal conflicts. It also created new tensions regarding property rights and cultural displacement as Indigenous people continued to be forced from their ancestral lands onto reservations, and Euro-Americans imposed their language, attire, and religion on them.



Albert Bierstadt (American, born in Germany, 1830–1902)

Wind River Country, ca. 1860

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Charles H. Bayly Collection, 1987.47

During the 1860s and 1870s, German-born Albert Bierstadt was one of the most famous artists in the United States. Bierstadt first went west in 1859 with the Lander Expedition to the Wind River Range in what was then the Nebraska Territory (now Wyoming). Soon after his return to the East, he painted this work, taking pains to record natural details such as the range of native tree species. A grizzly bear consuming a gutted antelope in the foreground is the only allusion to the inherent dangers of Bierstadt's journey in an otherwise Edenic scene bathed in warm light.



Thomas Moran (American, born in England, 1837–1926)

A Snowy Mountain Range (Path of Souls, Idaho), 1896

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.109

The Rocky Mountains became indelibly linked to ideas of the West, thanks to artistic depictions like those in this gallery. Thomas Moran's paintings convey the majesty and mystique of the American West through luminous colors and strong contrasts of light and shadow. From the 1870s onward, his depictions of the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone River valley were widely disseminated and are often credited with helping to create our national parks.



Thomas Moran (American, born in England, 1837–1926)

Grand Canyon Lodge, after 1896

Oil on panel

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.108



Albert Bierstadt (American, born in Germany, 1830–1902)

Mountain Lake, 1863

Oil on paper on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Gift of HRH Prince Bandar Bin Sultan Bin Abdulaziz, 2012.278



Samuel Colman (American, 1832–1920)

A View of Yosemite, Spiller Canyon and Bridgeport Valley, California, ca. 1888

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, by exchange, 2013.6



Albert Bierstadt (American, born in Germany, 1830–1902)

Evening Glow, date unknown

Oil on board

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.140



Thomas Moran (American, born in England, 1837–1926)

Sunset, Green River Butte, 1915

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.110



John William Casilear (American, 1811–1893)

Near Greeley, Colorado, 1882

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.457



Sanford Robinson Gifford (American, 1823–1880)

Longs Peak, Colorado, 1870

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Gift of Arthur J. Phelan, Jr., 2010.541

Some Hudson River School artists found the plains and deserts of the West just as interesting as its rugged peaks. The three small works here emphasize flat plains stretching away to a wall of mountains. They demonstrate each artist's attempts to capture the immense scale of the landscape around them, the quality of light filtered through the high altitude of Colorado, and the yellow and purple hues of an arid landscape much different from that of the lush Hudson River Valley in New York.



John Frederick Kensett (American, 1816–1872)

Snowy Range and Foothills from the Valley of Valmont, Colorado, 1870

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Williams, 1975.66

In 1870, John Frederick Kensett accompanied his friends Worthington Whittredge and Sanford Robinson Gifford on a train to Denver, Colorado, where they spent the summer sketching the Colorado Rockies. All three artists were associated with the Hudson River School. The vast expanses of the West, as well as its dry air and brilliant sunshine, contrasted sharply with the rolling green hills and more humid air of the East.



Worthington Whittredge (American, 1820–1910)

Foothills Colorado, 1870

Oil on paper

Denver Art Museum: Partial gift of the Houston Foundation in memory of M. Elliott Houston and funds from various donors, by exchange, 1969.160

In 1866 Worthington Whittredge first traveled west with General John Pope on a government expedition to meet with Indigenous peoples. He traveled nearly two thousand miles on horseback in a period of two months, marveling at the vast expanses of plains and soaring spines of mountains. After returning to his studio in New York City, he produced a number of Colorado-themed paintings, but soon decided that he needed to return to the Rocky Mountains for further study. In 1870, he made his second trip west, this time by train.

Dakota Hoska (Oglála Lakhóta):

One day, I was bike riding with a friend along a trail that circled Lake Nokomis in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This lake is one lake in a chain of lakes that runs through Minneapolis. Although this is Dakhóta homeland, *Nokomis* is an Ojibwe word taken from *nookomis*, which translates to “grandmother.” Wistfully, I wished aloud that I could see this area of Minneapolis as it had been before all of the houses encircled the lake and runoff had polluted the water. To which my friend replied, “Me too. I would run up and down claiming lots and reselling them, making an [expletive]-full of money!”

I think of this story when I look at this painting, and compare it to my view of the foothills today. The brown smog of industry and traffic unapologetically muffles their jagged view on most days. Assuredly, the Ute, Cheyenne, and Arapaho people called them something other than Flatirons when they lived, traded, and hunted here. Images like this painting served as advertisements for weary easterners yearning to escape foul cities in search of peace or adventure, and Whittredge’s title reinforces the possibility of this place for them. They came west, looked at the open plains in front of these rising rock formations, and dreamed of transformation. Like my friend, they viewed this area through a lens that I, the Indigenous nations from this place, and perhaps Whittredge himself would not have imagined. Wistfully, I again wish I could have seen this place before . . .



Albert Bierstadt (American, born in Germany, 1830–1902)

Estes Park, Long's Peak, 1877

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Denver Public Library, Western History Department, 35.2008

When visiting the West, Albert Bierstadt would paint outdoor sketches like *Mountain Lake*, on view nearby. Then, back in his New York studio, he combined these sketches into a single dramatic landscape, like the one you see here. Bierstadt paid close attention to minute details, but he also took artistic license in his large paintings, often doubling the size of a mountain to add spectacle to the work. By emphasizing the theatricality of a scene, he enabled viewers to vicariously participate in the adventures of an artist-explorer.



Charles Partridge Adams (American, 1858–1942)

Sunset in Colorado, ca. 1900

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Museum Exchange with Lemon Saks, 1969.53

Charles Partridge Adams moved to Colorado as a teenager in 1876, and, drawn to its jagged landscapes, stayed for the next forty years. His paintings express a poetic reaction to the Rocky Mountains and convey a sophisticated understanding of the varying effects of light and air. Here, using an *alla prima* technique—painting wet paint onto wet paint—Adams effectively captures the most intense moment of a saturated Colorado sunset with vibrant orange and yellow light emanating through the clouds.



A Wanderlust Memory

By the turn of the twentieth century, railroads and barbed wire had put an end to the open-range cattle era of the American West. Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell, arguably the most influential western artists of this period, witnessed these changes. In the words of Remington, “I knew the wild riders and the vacant land were about to vanish forever, and the more I considered

the subject the bigger the Forever loomed.” While lamenting the passing of an era, they—as well as many other painters, illustrators, and sculptors—ensured that the memory of an idealized “Old West” lived on. Underscored by nostalgia for a seemingly simpler and nobler time, the often-stereotyped characters and plots proved to be common material for Wild West shows, popular fiction, and cinema.

The stories of the West are, in truth, quite complicated. For many people, life there was marked by difficult changes in lifestyle and forced migration. While the Old West endures as an important part of American history, cowboy life and Indigenous culture remain vibrant into the present day.



Charles Marion Russell (American, 1864–1926)

In the Enemy’s Country, 1921

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Gift of the Magness family in memory of Betsy Magness, 1991.751

Because of his experience working with cattle, his friendship with Native Americans, and his talent with paintbrush and clay, the self-taught Charles Marion Russell became a preeminent artist of the Old West. While Russell’s subjects were meticulously observed, they were also a product of a natural storyteller’s lively imagination. Here, he captures the glowing jewel tones of Montana skies and confident yet careful Kootenai hunters striding alongside their horses, which are draped to appear like bison, through enemy Blackfeet country.



Frederic Remington (American, 1861–1909)

A Blackfoot Indian, 1888

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.139

Like Charles Marion Russell, Frederic Remington had very little formal training in the arts. Although he traveled fairly often to the West, he chose to remain in New York for most of his adult life. While his most notable work *Broncho Buster* (on view nearby) is a bronze sculpture, he began his career as an illustrator and painter. *A Blackfoot Indian* is an early work and far more detailed in comparison to Remington’s later paintings, in which he employs rapid, broken brushstrokes.



Frederic Remington (American, 1861–1909)

The Broncho Buster, modeled 1895, cast before May 1902 (Roman Bronze Works, cast number 12)

Bronze

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.91

A well-established illustrator and painter of the American West, Frederic Remington also produced some of the most iconic bronzes in American history. Here, he deftly captures the danger of riding an untamed horse. Compare this bronze with Charles Marion Russell's *A Bronc Twister* nearby, another example of how artists attempted the difficult task of expressing the intensity of the horse-and-man relationship in three dimensions. More broadly, the subject of bronc riding can be read as a metaphor for taming the West.



Frank Tenney Johnson (American, 1874–1939)

The Trail Boss, 1920

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.107

Indigenous people and some Euro-Americans alike witnessed with a sense of sadness the changes that led to the fencing and agricultural settlement of the West. As they grappled with a rapidly industrializing nation, many artists romanticized the West's past, exploiting its narrative qualities and drawing on sensational stories about the closing of the frontier. They created a visual lexicon of the American Old West that celebrated individual freedom, vast landscapes, and hard work, as represented in this painting, but often ignored the complicated and violent history of imperial expansion.



Charles Marion Russell (American, 1864–1926)

Buffalo Hunt, 1898

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Gift of Sharon Magness, 1997.517

At age sixteen, Charles Marion Russell moved from St. Louis, Missouri, to what was then the

Montana Territory. Russell worked in the cattle business from 1882 to 1893 before pursuing painting full-time as a self-taught artist. The development of his color palette is evident in this rather monochromatic work when compared to *In the Enemy's Country*, made twenty-three years later, on view nearby. *Buffalo Hunt* contains the same compositional dynamism, though, giving the viewer a sense of apprehension.



Alexander Phimister Proctor (American, born in Canada, 1860–1950)

Buffalo, modeled 1912, cast 1913 or after

Bronze

Denver Art Museum: Funds from the Harry I. and Edythe Smookler Memorial Endowment, Estelle Wolf, and the Flower Foundation, 2011.276



Harvey T. Dunn (American, 1884–1952)

The Chuckwagon, 1915

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.1144

The masculine grit and dangerous adventure of western life served as enticing subject matter in books, periodicals, and magazines. But these were not the only kinds of western tales. Harvey Dunn's *The Chuckwagon* displays the quieter aspects of life on the range. Cowboys sit cross-legged as they prepare to eat a communal meal—probably beans and coffee. The panorama behind them depicts hazy mountain ranges that complement the bedrolls in the foreground and give the scene a pastoral setting.



Charles Marion Russell (American, 1864–1926)

A Bronc Twister (The Weaver), modeled 1911, cast ca. 1935–41

Bronze

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.123

A Bronc Twister is a testament to Charles Marion Russell's ability to render motion and strength in

three dimensions. Working at a cattle ranch in the Montana Territory offered him the opportunity to become familiar with the anatomy of the animals he later depicted, including buffalo and horses.



Thomas Eakins (American, 1844–1916)

Sketch of a Cowboy at Work, ca. 1887

Oil on canvas on Masonite

Denver Art Museum: Funds from William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, by exchange, 2008.489



Thomas Eakins (American, 1844–1916)

Cowboy: Study for Cowboys in the Badlands, ca. 1887

Oil on canvas on panel

Denver Art Museum: Funds from William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, by exchange, 2008.490

A highly respected American artist, Thomas Eakins was devastated when he was dismissed from his teaching position at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts because of a scandal involving the perceived inappropriate use of nude models in 1886. Needing a change of scenery, he traveled to Dakota Territory during the summer of 1887 and made countless photographs and oil sketches. This quickly painted sketch was later used to create a larger cowboy-themed work when Eakins was back in his East Coast studio.



Alexander Phimister Proctor (American, born in Canada, 1860–1950)

Buckaroo, 1914, cast 1915 or after

Bronze

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, by exchange, 2005.12



N. C. Wyeth (American, 1882–1945)

Gunfight, ca. 1916

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.443

An increasingly educated public and innovations in printing technology ushered in the Golden Age of Illustration (1880–1920). During this time, the most widely circulated images featured high drama played out by epic-sized characters. N. C. Wyeth's painting of a saloon fight presents a larger-than-life vision of a bygone era, peopled with unlawful and unruly stereotypes. It illustrated Frank Spearman's 1916 western novel *Nan of Music Mountain*, which was adapted as a silent film the following year.



William H. D. Koerner (American, 1878–1938)

Illustration for the *Saturday Evening Post*, "The Tenth Law," *Don't You Go Frettin', Sallie, I'll Tend To It*, 1922

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.121



Allen Tupper True (American, 1881–1955)

A Wanderlust Memory, ca. 1912

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Funds from Helen Dill bequest, 1936.2



Solon Hannibal Borglum (American, 1868–1922)

Lassoing Wild Horses, modeled 1898, cast 1902

Bronze

Denver Art Museum: Funds from the William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, by exchange, 2011.9



William Herbert Dunton (American, 1878–1936)

The Open Range, 1914

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.94



Indigenous Loss

The sense of loss experienced by Euro-Americans as the era of American expansion seemed to be coming to a close pales in comparison with the loss of Indigenous lifeways caused by genocide, disease, forced migration, and forced assimilation. In the 1800s, American expansion displaced more than five hundred nations of people who had lived on the continent for thousands of years. During that time, they had developed sophisticated trading routes, land management processes, and cultural, social, and political systems. By the 1900s, however, most Native Americans had been forcibly removed to reservations and encouraged to farm land that was not arable. The buffalo—and the accompanying way of life that surrounded responsible hunting of the animal—had been nearly killed off. Often denied the rations promised by an inconsistent federal government, Indigenous people suffered from starvation and poverty. Their children were regularly sent to boarding schools where they were subjected to cultural oppression and physical and sexual abuse. While Indigenous people continue to grapple with historical trauma stemming from such experiences, they have maintained their cultural practices and languages against great odds.



Alexander Phimister Proctor (American, born in Canada, 1860–1950)

Indian Warrior, modeled 1898, cast ca. 1922

Bronze

Denver Art Museum: Funds from Sharon Magness and the Harry I. and Edythe Smookler Memorial Endowment, 2016.293

Alexander Phimister Proctor was one of the first sculptors to make public monuments of Indigenous peoples. After helping to create a monument of Civil War Union general William T. Sherman, Proctor was inspired to attempt his own horse-and-rider statue. The result was this sculpture, in which Proctor made his own statement about what constituted a great American military leader.



Charles Schreyvogel (American, 1861–1912)

Sevaro, Chief of the Capota Ute, ca. 1900

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.1203

By the end of the 1800s, artists interested in depicting Native American individuals and customs traveled to reservations and military forts in search of models. In 1893, New Jersey–based Charles Schreyvogel traveled to the Southern Ute Reservation in Colorado. There, he likely met Sevaro, chief of the Capota band of the Ute people, whom he later painted in a fur coat and feather headdress.



Adolph Alexander Weinman (American, 1870–1952)

Chief Blackbird, Ogalalla Sioux, 1903

Bronze

Denver Art Museum: Funds from the DAM Westerners, in honor of Lucy and Jim Wallace, 2013.35

Adolf Alexander Weinman produced this portrait of Chief Blackbird, a veteran of the Great Sioux War of 1876, after watching him perform in Colonel Frederick T. Cummins's Wild West show at New York's Madison Square Garden. Wild West shows traveled around the country and around the world, entertaining visitors with romanticized and stereotyped visions of the American West that were reinforced in art, literature, and eventually film. Weinman's portrayal of the chief is remarkably accurate, with his rugged face, eagle-feather headdress, and beaded hide shirt painstakingly recorded.



George de Forest Brush (American, 1855–1941)

Portrait of an Indian, ca. 1887

Oil on panel

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.97

This portrait probably features an Apache man who, as part of Geronimo's band, had eluded capture by the US government for years. Depictions of the Apache Wars (including some of Frederic

Remington's earliest illustrations) populated eastern periodicals during the 1880s. When members of Geronimo's troops were exiled from the Southwest to an army prison in Florida, George de Forest Brush traveled from New York to paint them. Here, he depicts this man's melancholy—a reflection of the loss of territory and tradition forced upon Indigenous Americans during the 19th century.



Joseph Henry Sharp (American, 1859–1953)

Young Crow Indian, date unknown

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.929

Joseph Henry Sharp moved north after working in Taos for many years and built a cabin at Crow Agency on the Crow Indian Reservation in southeastern Montana. He traveled throughout the region and painted many locals, such as the individual depicted in *Young Crow Indian*, as well as landscapes.



Taos Society of Artists

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, many aspiring American artists studied abroad in prestigious French and German academies. There, they sketched the human figure and copied historic works of art, but they also learned about newer, more unconventional styles, such as the spontaneous brushstrokes and pure colors of impressionism. The artists in this section studied in Munich and Paris but searched for subjects that they considered uniquely American when they returned. The remote northern New Mexico town of Taos proved particularly spellbinding. Attracted to the area's expanses of mountains, vivid sunlight, and Indigenous and Hispanic cultures, six painters formed the Taos Society of Artists in 1915. Global politics also informed this choice. When World War I closed European borders between 1914 and 1918, artists who might have sought training and inspiration abroad turned instead to the American West.



E. Irving Couse (American, 1866–1936)

Moonlight in Taos, 1920

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.98



William Herbert Dunton (American, 1878–1936)

Evening on the Range, before 1925

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Gift from Dr. George C. Peck and Catherine M. Peck, 2013.465



Victor Higgins (American, 1884–1949)

Taos, New Mexico, ca. 1921

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Gift from Dr. George C. Peck and Catherine M. Peck, 2013.462

Mabel Dodge Luhan, a patron of the arts who lived in Taos, wrote that Victor Higgins “can say more with his pearly tones than most painters do with the whole solid color scale.” Here, Higgins evokes crisp winter air with his “pearly tones” and throws sloping hills into contrast with sharp blue shadows. A sturdy line of adobe architecture nestled beneath soaring mountains underscores what Luhan called the artist’s “dramatic appreciation” of the region’s sublime landscapes and its indomitable people.



Victor Higgins (American, 1884–1949)

Game Hunter (Snow), 1922

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.440



E. Martin Hennings (American, 1886–1956)

A Friendly Encounter, ca. 1922

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, by exchange; The William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, by exchange; funds from Henry Roath, Lanny and Sharon Martin, 2013 Collectors’ Choice, and The Second Decade Fund, 2014.28



Bert Geer Phillips (American, 1868–1956)

Pueblo Indian Girl and Wild Plum Blossoms, before 1912

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.111

In 1898, Phillips left Denver with his friend Ernest Blumenschein on his way to Mexico for a sketching trip. Delayed in Taos by a broken wagon wheel, he was entranced by the landscape and people and never left. In this painting, his favorite model from Taos Pueblo wears the dress of a married woman: a cotton manta draped over one shoulder and belted at the waist, with tall white deerskin boots.



E. Martin Hennings (American, 1886–1956)

The Rabbit Hunt, ca. 1925

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.449

Born in Chicago, E. Martin Hennings studied in Munich and traveled through Europe before visiting Taos in 1917. Rather than placing Indigenous peoples in an imagined past, Hennings observed their lifestyle in the present. In this painting, a dark storm fills the background and pushes the brightly lit foreground figures toward the viewer. We see not only a contrast in atmosphere but also of cultures: the male figures wear traditional moccasins and blankets as well as modern clothing like a tennis sweater and necktie.



Joseph Henry Sharp (American, 1859–1953)

Summer Visitors, ca. 1919

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.115



Oscar Edmund Berninghaus (American, 1874–1952)

Indians Threshing Wheat—Taos, ca. 1921

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.96

Albert Bender (Cherokee):

This painting, completed by Berninghaus around 1921, illustrates the attempt by the US government to assimilate Native Americans into European-American culture in the early 20th century. The threshing of wheat was a non-Indigenous American farming technique.

Oscar Edmund Berninghaus was well known for his artistic renderings of Indigenous Americans. This painting was of the Taos Pueblo Indians in northern New Mexico during this period. The Taos people were and are very traditional to this very day. When the painting was done, they were trying to reach an accommodation for survival in the cultivation of wheat, a non-Native food plant that originated in the Middle East.

Berninghaus early in his career became captivated by Native American culture, and the Taos Pueblo were among his favorite subjects. There is little doubt that he wanted to record significant changes in Indigenous practices in his works. He was also a founding member of the Taos Society of Artists, a non-Indian organization of visual artists established in 1915.

Taos Pueblo is an ancient settlement that was founded more than two thousand years ago, and the aboriginal food crops were mainly corn, beans, and squash.

At the time of the painting, the federal government had been pursuing an assimilation program that included the replacement of traditional food crops because of the cultural ceremonies associated with them. This government program began in 1790, shortly after the founding of the republic.

Indigenous peoples, particularly in the western states, were encouraged to raise wheat, hence the very thought-provoking painting by Berninghaus recording this change.



Walter Ufer (American, born in Germany, 1876–1936)

My Back Yard, ca. 1921

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.116

Walter Ufer, who trained in Chicago and Europe, spent many summers in Taos before moving there permanently. In this backyard view of Taos, he paints flat adobe walls in broad, glossy strokes that capture the heat of midday. These contrast with the stippled brushstrokes in the blue sky and the softly billowing clouds. The different surface treatments animate what would otherwise be a mundane subject of everyday life.



Ernest L. Blumenschein (American, 1874–1960)

Landscape with Indian Camp, 1920, reworked 1929

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.137



E. Irving Couse (American, 1866–1936)

Crouching Indian by a Fire, ca. 1910

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Funds from 1986 Collectors' Choice, 1986.8

Like many American artists of his time, E. Irving Couse trained in traditional French art academies. When he moved to New Mexico, he brought those conservative painting habits with him: he worked in a studio from models that he posed with props, he preferred to paint the human form with as little clothing as possible, and he banished almost all signs of the modern world from his work. Couse romanticized his subjects, often picturing one or two figures absorbed in activities such as bead-making, basket-weaving, playing music, and hunting, or in a state of calm reverie in nature.



Joseph Henry Sharp (American, 1859–1953)

The Red Olla, ca. 1925

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William D. Hewitt Charitable Annuity Trust, 1989.148



Ernest L. Blumenschein (American, 1874–1960)

Eagle Fan, 1915

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, by exchange, 2001.446

In the mid-1890s, Bert Geer Phillips, Ernest L. Blumenschein, and Joseph Henry Sharp met while studying in Paris. Sharp had earlier visited Taos and boasted of its beauty and rich subject matter. Phillips and Blumenschein would accidentally make their way there in 1898 when, en route to Mexico, their wagon wheel broke about twenty miles outside of Taos. As the now-legendary story goes, they flipped a coin to determine who would take the broken wheel into town, and Blumenschein lost the toss. *Eagle Fan* was painted in the same year that he and others established the Taos Society of Artists.



A Modern West

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the world seemed to be moving toward a future full of possibility, as novel methods of travel and communication transformed everyday life. Avant-garde (new and experimental) artworks from Europe challenged traditional artistic practice. Some of the unconventional techniques artists employed to express the world around them included using bold colors and patterns, radically simplifying or abstracting shapes, flattening three-dimensional forms, and tilting perspectives. The American West maintained its prominence as a source of inspiration for those seeking new forms of visual representation. Its dramatic landscapes and intense light lent themselves to modern styles, and a younger generation of artists saw new relevance in the centuries-old design motifs of Indigenous art. During a tumultuous era that witnessed technological innovation as well as the tragedies of World War I and the Great Depression, depictions of the West preserved key components of American myth and history.



Frank Mechau (American, 1904–1946)

Rodeo-Pickup Man, ca. 1930

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Gift of Anne Evans, 1935.9

Frank Mechau was one of many American artists who trained abroad during the early 1900s, but ultimately turned their attention to the specificities of America's diverse geographic regions and cultures. Over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, they painted depictions of everyday life using the modern techniques then in style, such as the flattening of space and simplification of forms seen here. These artists, most famously Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood, became known as the country's foremost regionalists, or painters of the American scene.



Kenneth Miller Adams (American, 1897–1966)

Reapers (Harvest), 1946

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Gift from Dr. George C. Peck and Catherine M. Peck, 2013.466

Kenneth Miller Adams studied in France and Italy before moving to Taos in 1924, where he became interested in the local Spanish American population. Here, he surrounds the strong bodies of two female workers with golden harvest tones. The viewer's eye travels around the composition—from the upright woman in the green dress, through her sheaf of wheat, and down the stooping woman's back and arm. This movement imitates the endless motion of these women's exhausting labor.



William Herbert Dunton (American, 1878–1936)

Black Bears, ca. 1927

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.101

Although paintings of cowboys on horseback by William Herbert Dunton are featured elsewhere in this exhibition, his favorite subject was the black bear. In this work, Dunton depicts a mother bear and her cubs ambling through a densely forested landscape. Dunton emphasizes the bears' textured fur, allowing their mass and movement to take center stage, leading the eye into the depths of the landscape.



William Penhallow Henderson (American, 1877–1943)

Little Sister (The Chaperone), ca. 1916

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Gift of Mrs. Edgar Rossin, 1974.16

William Penhallow Henderson worked as a painter, muralist, architect, arts educator, and furniture maker. After moving to Taos from Chicago in 1916, he became interested in Hispanic and Indigenous culture. The carved patterns of the lowboy were inspired by Spanish floral motifs and geometric Puebloan designs, and Henderson carefully textured the surface with an adze (small ax). The painting shows a Hispanic man and two women enjoying an evening walk. Henderson grabs our attention with the rich red of the closest woman's coat and glove and frames the group with the vibrant green of a tree and a barbed wire fence.



William Penhallow Henderson (American, 1877–1943)

Lowboy, 1929

Hand-carved and adzed pine

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, by exchange, 2013.89



Homer Boss (American, 1882–1956)

Koh-tseh (Yellow Buffalo), 1931

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.1210



Nicolai Fechin (American, born in Russia, 1881–1955)

Mexican Cowboy, 1935

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.463



Randall Davey (American, 1887–1964)

Western Man, 1920

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.1197

Randall Davey's interest in this Hispanic man may have been inspired by his teacher Robert Henri's many sympathetic portraits of diverse men and women from around the country. The black backdrop focuses our attention on the sitter, who is painted with dignity, his kerchief tucked into his waistcoat and hat in hand. Davey first visited New Mexico in 1919 with his friend John Sloan, whose work is also on display here.



Robert Henri (American, 1865–1929)

Tom Po Qui (Water of Antelope Lake/Indian Girl/Ramoncita), 1914

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.461

A famed painter and arts educator based in New York City, Robert Henri traveled to the American West and made portraits of the people he met. Here, with his characteristic quick, gestural brushstrokes, he depicts the colorful clothing and forthright gaze of Tom Po Qui, a Tewa artist. He pays particular attention to the glint of light off her silver squash blossom necklace, a style characteristic to Indigenous peoples of the Southwest. Henri played an important role in making Santa Fe an art center in the first half of the 20th century by encouraging his wide network of fellow artists to come to the area and by helping to create less restrictive exhibition methods in galleries and museums than those found in the East.



Raymond Jonson (American, 1891–1982)

Pueblo Series, Acoma, 1927

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.441

When Raymond Jonson first visited New Mexico in 1922, he found the landscape and light well suited to his increasingly abstract approach. To create an intensified vision of storms rolling through mesas, Jonson uses saturated hues and contrasting light. Further, he combines sharp-edged lines with soft, regular brushstrokes, and balances the geometric forms of mesas and Acoma Pueblo (the oldest continuously inhabited community in North America) with the rounded swells of green hills and low clouds.



Jozef G. Bakos (American, 1891–1977)

Rocks in the Clearing, 1918–19

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, by exchange, 2011.277



Marsden Hartley (American, 1877–1943)

New Mexico Recollection #6, 1922

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, 2001.455

Marsden Hartley traveled to New Mexico for the first and only time in 1918. He found the Southwest both inspiring and challenging, writing that “there is nothing in conventional esthetics that will express the red deposits, the mesas, and the Canyon of the Rio Grande.” Even after moving away, though, he continued to ponder the Southwest, producing the *New Mexico Recollections* series of paintings that reprised the subject in unconventional ways, including the use of atypical color and little detail.



C. Paul Jennewein (American, born in Germany, 1890–1978)

Indian and Eagle, 1929

Bronze

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, by exchange, 2011.439



Gene Kloss (born Alice Geneva Glasier; American, 1903–1996)

In the Rio Grande Gorge, ca. 1950

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Funds from William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, by exchange, 2018.33

The only woman artist represented in the exhibition, Gene Kloss made many paintings and prints of the western landscape she first saw on her honeymoon in New Mexico in 1925. She returned to Taos for several months every year thereafter until she made it her permanent home in 1960. Like several artists in this section, she was employed by the federal government's Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) during the Great Depression as part of the New Deal.



Thomas Hart Benton (American, 1889–1975)

New Mexico (Landscape), 1926

Oil and egg tempera on Masonite

Denver Art Museum: Funds from Helen Dill bequest, 1937.2

By the 1920s, train transportation was no longer a novelty, and many American tourists, including Thomas Hart Benton, traveled by automobile. The train, however, remained a symbol of progress and adventure. Here, Benton depicts a smoke-billowing train slicing through rural New Mexico. Later, when Benton wrote about his travels in *An Artist in America*, he described the train as “the prime space cutter and therefore the great symbol of change.”



Maynard Dixon (American, 1875–1946)

Wide Lands of the Navajo, 1945

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Roath Collection, 2013.100



John Sloan (American, 1871–1951)

Gateway to Cerrillos, 1946

Mixed media on panel

Denver Art Museum: William Sr. and Dorothy Harmsen Collection, by exchange, 2006.73

By the mid-20th century, Santa Fe, New Mexico, had become solidified as a haven for many modernist artists, thanks to figures like Robert Henri who had championed the state capital as a creative center. His former student John Sloan came to the city in 1919 with Randall Davey. This scene depicts nature and humanity coexisting as two figures—perhaps the artist and his wife—paint beside the road winding through a rocky outcrop.



Maynard Dixon (American, 1875–1946)

Study in Cubist Realism, 1925

Oil on panel

Lent by Grant and Betty Hagestad, 43.2009

On this decorative screen, Maynard Dixon simplifies a mountain into its basic angles and uses only two colors: orange for the light and a dark blue for the shadows. Although European artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque had invented cubism about fifteen years before, when Dixon painted this screen it was an early example of cubism in the American West.



Andrew Dasburg (American, 1887–1979)

Bonnie, 1927

Oil on canvas

Denver Art Museum: Lucile and Donald Graham Collection, 1981.624



Important dates in the history of the American West through 1924

This timeline features selected dates in recorded history. We also acknowledge the Indigenous people who have lived in the American West for thousands of years and continue to call its regions their homelands.

600–1450

The Hohokam create extensive irrigation canals along the Salt and Gila rivers, servicing more than 100,000 acres of mostly arid desert country in what is now known as southern Arizona.

750–1150

The Mimbres culture of southwest New Mexico, a branch of the Mogollon region, is known for their distinctive pottery, featuring expressive black-on-white designs.

900–1350

Stone and earth dwellings are built along cliff walls in the Southwest by Ancestral Puebloans.

1492

As many as twelve million people inhabit lands north of the Rio Grande when Christopher Columbus arrives in the present-day Bahamas during a voyage sponsored by the Crown of Castile (now Spain).

1513

Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León leads the first known European voyage to present-day Florida.

1527

A gulf hurricane upends the expedition of Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca. De Vaca and three other survivors wash up on what is now the Texas coast, near present-day Galveston Island. They are the first known Europeans in the American West. For the next eight years, they travel across what is

now the American Southwest living with various Native American groups. In 1536, they reconnect with Spanish settlements in Mexico.

1539–40

Hernando de Soto lands in present-day Florida and is the first European to cross the Mississippi River. Francisco Vázquez de Coronado arrives in present-day New Mexico by traveling north from Mexico. De Soto and Coronado develop hostile relationships with Indigenous peoples and introduce diseases such as measles and smallpox.

1598

Spanish conquistador Juan de Oñate establishes Nuevo México near the upper Rio Grande (now Santa Fe, New Mexico). It becomes the northernmost province of New Spain and the first European settlement in the American West. Oñate confiscates a pueblo and establishes it as his headquarters, renaming it San Juan.

1620

English pilgrims land at Plymouth, Massachusetts.

1690

Alonso de León establishes a mission at San Francisco de los Tejas near the Neches River, the first Spanish settlement in present-day Texas.

1741

French fur traders Pierre and Paul Mallet are the first Europeans to report an uncharted mountain range, now known as the Rocky Mountains, during their expedition through the interior of the continent.

1769

Father Junipero Serra and Spanish Franciscans establish the first mission in present-day California. By 1823, twenty more missions are established, bringing European culture to the Indigenous peoples of the region and contributing to a decline in their population.

1775

The Revolutionary War between Britain and its North American colonies begins.

1787

The Northwest Ordinance sets guidelines for settlement on the American frontier, including the prohibition of slavery and a requirement to deal fairly with Indigenous peoples.

The US Constitution is approved by the Constitutional Convention and ratified the following year.

1803

The United States agrees to buy the French colony La Louisiane from the French Republic, acquiring an area of land that extends from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains.

1804–6

Commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson, the Corps of Discovery expedition sets out to explore and chart the territory acquired in the Louisiana Purchase. Led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, the thirty-member party is accompanied by a French trader named Toussaint Charbonneau; his wife, Sacagawea, a Shoshone woman; and their baby. During the two-and-a-half-year expedition, the party makes contact with 70 groups of Indigenous peoples, produces 140 maps, and documents more than 200 plant and animal species.

1808

The Treaty of Fort Clark is signed. The Osage Nation cedes its territory east of Fort Clark (present-day Brackettville, Texas) and north of the Arkansas River to the United States.

1820

The Missouri Compromise brings Missouri and Maine into the union and slavery to the American West.

By this time, more than 20,000 Indigenous peoples are enslaved on the California missions.

1821

The first 297 pioneer families and partnerships known as the Old Three Hundred are granted land titles in present-day Texas by the Mexican government. By 1824, most of the colonists had settled in the area.

1824

The Bureau of Indian Affairs is established within the War Department of the US government. Its primary duty is to regulate and settle disputes arising from trade with Indigenous nations.

1825

The federal government adopts a policy of exchanging tribal lands in the East for public lands in the West, where Indigenous peoples can live beyond state jurisdiction and organize their own forms of government.

1830

The Indian Removal Act is signed into law by President Andrew Jackson, authorizing the US government to forcibly remove Indigenous peoples from the Southeast to federal territory in present-day Oklahoma.

1831–40

Thousands of Indigenous peoples, including Cherokee, Choctaw, and Muscogee (Creek), are forcibly removed from their homelands in the Southeast, traveling to Indian Territory along the Trail of Tears.

1832

Artist George Catlin begins his voyage up the Missouri. He travels more than two thousand miles with trappers from the American Fur Company to their outpost at Fort Union and paints hundreds of portraits of Indigenous peoples along the way.

1834

Congress restructures the Bureau of Indian Affairs as the Department of Indian Affairs, expanding the agency's responsibilities to include administering the Indigenous lands of the West.

1841

John Bidwell organizes the Western Emigration Society and leads the first wagon train of pioneers across the Rockies.

1843

The Great Migration, a party of one thousand pioneers, heads west from Independence, Missouri, on the Oregon Trail. The migration becomes an annual event, with thousands more making the trek every year.

1845

John L. Sullivan, editor of *The US Magazine and Democratic Review*, argues that it is "our Manifest Destiny . . . to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions."

1848

After two years of conflict with the United States, Mexico cedes Texas and the territory that encompasses present-day California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, and some of New Mexico.

1849

After the discovery of gold in California, prospectors heading for the gold fields expand the network of trails across the continent. They pioneer the boomtown life that will follow miners throughout the West. By the end of the year, more than eighty thousand people travel to California, tripling the territory's population.

1850

With miners flooding the region and devastating the land, Indigenous peoples of California find themselves deprived of their traditional food sources and are forced to raid mining towns and settlements for food. Miners retaliate by hunting down Indigenous peoples and brutally abusing them. The California legislature responds by passing the Indenture Act, establishing a form of legal slavery in which white settlers can declare Indigenous people vagrant and auction off their services. This law also allows for the enslavement of Indigenous children, leading to widespread kidnapping.

1851

The first Fort Laramie Treaty is signed in present-day Wyoming by the United States and representatives of the Lakota, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Crow, Arikara, Assiniboine, Mandan, Gros Ventre, and other Indigenous nations. The treaty defines the territory of the Plains, promising protection and annuities to the Indigenous peoples in exchange for safe passage for settlers and the right to build roads.

1852

By the end of the year, more than twenty thousand Chinese immigrants have come to America, arriving in San Francisco to join the search for gold.

1853

California begins confining its remaining Indigenous population on harsh military reservations. As many as 150,000 Indigenous people lived in the state before 1849; by 1870, fewer than 30,000 will remain.

1859

Frederick W. Lander leads a government expedition to the Rocky Mountains that includes artist Albert Bierstadt.

Gold is discovered in Boulder Canyon, Colorado, sparking the Pikes Peak gold rush which brings 100,000 people to the Rockies.

The Homestead Act is signed. This legislation allows private citizens to purchase up to 160 acres of public land in the western US for \$1.25 per acre; they are entitled to own the land after five years of residence and improvement.

1864

Colonel Kit Carson leads a campaign of destruction against the Navajo in northwestern New Mexico. When the Navajo surrender, eight thousand are marched on the Long Walk across New Mexico to a reservation near Fort Sumner, where they are held as prisoners of war until 1868.

1866

General Philip H. Sheridan takes command of US forces in the West, proposing to bring peace to the Plains by exterminating the buffalo. "Kill the buffalo and you kill the Indians," he says.

The United States and representatives of the Comanche, Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and other southern Plains nations sign the Medicine Lodge Treaty. This agreement moves Indigenous peoples to reservations in present-day Oklahoma in exchange for their native lands.

1868

Chief Red Cloud and General William Tecumseh Sherman sign the second Fort Laramie Treaty, which brings an end to war along the Bozeman Trail. Under terms of the treaty, the United States agrees to abandon its forts along the Bozeman Trail and grant enormous parts of the Wyoming, Montana, and Dakota Territories—including the Black Hills area—exclusively to the Lakota people.

1869

Seven years after the Pacific Railroad Act was authorized by Congress in 1862, the first transcontinental railroad, known originally as the Pacific Railroad, is completed.

1871

Photographer William Henry Jackson and painter Thomas Moran accompany a geological surveying expedition of the Rocky Mountains and the Yellowstone region. Their depictions help to raise interest in these locations.

1872

Yellowstone is designated a National Park.

Congress passes the Indian Appropriations Act, ending the treaty system that had recognized tribes as

independent domestic nations and bringing Native American affairs under congressional control.

1874–75

After gold is discovered in the Black Hills of Dakota, a sacred part of Lakota territory, the government defies the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty that protected Lakota lands and instead works to negotiate access for miners. The Lakota refuse to alter the terms of the treaty and decline an offer from the government to purchase the land.

1876–77

Federal authorities order the Lakota chiefs to report to their reservations by January 31. Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and others refuse, sparking the Great Sioux War. Crazy Horse surrenders and is killed, and Sitting Bull and his band flee to Canada, where he remains in exile for four years.

Congress repeals the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 and takes back the Black Hills, along with forty million more acres of Lakota land. With the threat of Indian attack removed, mining camps and boomtowns crowd the Black Hills.

1878

Racial discrimination in the post-Reconstruction South sparked a wave of migration of Black Americans to the West from former slave states.

1879

Congress creates the US Bureau of Ethnology to coordinate study of the region's native peoples and complete a record of their cultures before they vanish under the pressure of expanding white settlement.

A group of eighty-four Lakota children become the first students at the newly established US Indian Training and Industrial School at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. This boarding school removed Indigenous children from their native culture and assimilated them into Euro-American culture. Over the next two decades, twenty-four more schools on the Carlisle model are established outside the reservations.

1881

In Tombstone, Arizona, deputy marshal Wyatt Earp and his brothers gun down the Clantons in a showdown at the O.K. Corral, becoming the inspiration for countless scenes in western film and television episodes.

1882

Intensifying its anti-Chinese policies, Congress passes the Chinese Exclusion Act, which completely prohibits both immigration from China and the naturalization of Chinese immigrants already in the United States for a period of ten years.

1883

"Buffalo Bill" Cody stages his first Wild West show at the Omaha fairgrounds, featuring a herd of buffalo and a troupe of cowboys, "Indians," and vaqueros who reenact a cattle roundup, a stagecoach holdup, and other scenes drawn from Cody's own life on the frontier.

After nineteen years, the Northern Pacific Railroad, connecting the northwestern states to the East, is finally completed.

1886

Apache leader Geronimo surrenders to General Nelson A. Miles in Skeleton Canyon, Arizona, after more than a decade of guerilla warfare against American and Mexican settlers in the Southwest. The terms of surrender require Geronimo and other Apache to settle in Florida.

1887

Congress passes the Dawes Severalty Act, granting allotments of Indian reservation land to individual tribe members and making surplus land available to white settlers.

1889

President Benjamin Harrison authorizes opening unoccupied lands in the Indian Territory to white settlement. Within nine hours, the Oklahoma Land Rush transforms almost two million acres of tribal land into thousands of individual land claims. Many of the most desirable plots are taken by "Sooners," so called because they crossed into the territory sooner than was permitted.

1890

Congress establishes the Oklahoma Territory on unoccupied lands in the Indian Territory, breaking a sixty-year-old pledge to preserve this area exclusively for Native Americans forced from their lands in the East.

Congress establishes Yosemite National Park.

The US census indicates that the western United States has been populated to the extent that there is no longer an official frontier.

1892

Under the Dawes Act, nearly two million acres of Crow tribal land is opened to white settlers in Montana.

John Muir founds the Sierra Club in Yosemite Valley, California, to “protect the nation’s scenic resources” and oppose the lumber industry’s encroachments on public forests.

1893

After two decades of hunting buffalo, experts estimate that fewer than two thousand remain of the more than twenty million that once roamed the western plains.

More than one hundred thousand white settlers rush into Oklahoma’s Cherokee Outlet to claim six million acres of former Cherokee land.

1901

The Spindletop oil gusher in Beaumont, Texas, opens a century when “black gold” will play a vital role in the economy of the West, as Americans exchange the horse for the horsepower of the automobile.

Congress confers US citizenship on all Native Americans residing in the Oklahoma Territory.

1909

Under the Dawes Act, 700,000 acres of former tribal land is opened to white settlers in Washington, Idaho, and Montana. The steady erosion of tribal integrity represented by the Dawes Act will continue until its repeal in 1934.

1924

Congress declares all Native Americans to be citizens of the United States.

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