

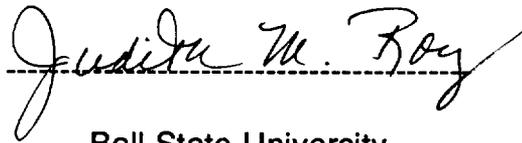
Thomas Moran and the Myth of the American West

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Judith M. Roy", is written over a horizontal dashed line.

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Thomas Moran and grand, picturesque scenes of the West are often thought of synonymously. However, Moran did not begin his artistic career with the sole purpose of painting the West. On the contrary, his reputation as a landscape artist was quite strong for almost a decade before he ever pointed his brush in a westward direction.¹ Moran was one of the many who was pulled West by the opportunities and beauties the unchartered territory offered. He, like thousands of others, was enchanted by a myth of milk and honey -- a Garden of Eden waiting to be cultivated and a harvest to be reaped. Moran went West to capture on canvas the heart of this Eden, taking it back East and further fostering the dream of the West. Moran's paintings simply reinforced a myth that was already well-grounded in public opinion. The myth of the West was based on ignorance, exaggerated tales, and surmised truths, a theory distant from reality.²

Moran achieved his greatest fame as an American artist during the nineteenth century. However, his roots were not originally in the United States. In 1837, Moran was born in Bolton, Lancashire, England. A short seven years later Moran's family moved to the United States, more specifically Philadelphia, and it was here that his interest in art and eventually the West bloomed.³ Moran attended grammar school in Philadelphia until the age of 15. Up until this time he had expressed a great interest in art, often visiting local art shops to study the works of such American artists as Rembrandt Peale and Washington Allston. Moran's interest in art was not surprising, three of his older brothers had already pursued careers in landscape painting and photography. Later generations of the Moran family combined with this first, would turn out over a dozen eminent artists.⁴

After Moran finished his schooling he was apprenticed to the engraving firm of Telfer and Scattergood. He had already determined to become an artist, but knew he must be able to support himself. Moran's first job at the firm was as an engraver but,

he disliked this and drew in his spare time. When Telfer saw these drawings, he immediately recognized the boy's talent and assigned him to this new task. Moran's apprenticeship was to have lasted seven years, but he contracted rheumatic fever, cutting it short after three years. After recovering successfully he refused to return.⁵

Instead, Moran and his brother Edward started a studio in Philadelphia; he finally began the career he truly loved: painting. At this time, the marine painter James Hamilton introduced him to such European artists as J.M.W. Turner, the English landscape painter whom Moran would come to admire. Moran used this time to teach himself to paint and traded small works he had painted for art books. In 1856, he produced his first substantial oil, *Among the Ruins There He Lingered*. This work was prompted by Percy Shelley's *Alastor* and was shown in 1858 at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Moran took great interest in the romantic poets, his favorite poem being Longfellow's, "The Song of Hiawatha."⁶ This freedom of spirit and originality espoused by romanticism would later be reflected in his works.⁷

In 1861, Moran had the opportunity to travel to Europe. There, he eagerly studied the works of J.M.W. Turner and Claude Lorrain. Moran especially admired Turner, even copying two of his oil paintings and some of his watercolors to learn the details of the of the artist's work. Turner's vibrant colors, "overwhelming natural effects and . . . compelling artistic styles"⁸ combined to make fascinating works that "astounded and bewildered his contemporaries and [are] still not altogether comprehensible today."⁹ Indeed, some of Turner's pieces are almost impressionistic in style with their fluttering brushwork. Lorrain was also a popular landscape painter, from whose "lyrical, more domesticated"¹⁰ landscapes, Moran learned composition.¹¹ Claude was also interested in atmospheric light and Moran took up this interest in his own paintings.¹² The techniques of both of these artists would be apparent in his later works.¹³

Moran had always loved nature and so he logically turned to painting landscapes. He followed a long line of landscape painters in the United States who had focused on the wilderness. The principle technique of landscape painting which he chose to emulate that of after Thomas Cole. In the mid-1820s, Thomas Cole had established a new approach to landscape painting, one which concentrated on the American wilderness. Influenced by romanticism, Claude Lorrain, and J. M. W. Turner, Cole's wilderness canvases were greatly detailed with the theme of an untouched, uncontrollable wilderness. Cole depicted nature as a powerful force in which humans were subordinate. Adding to the popularity of Cole's paintings was the religious fervor that captivated America during this period. The wilderness became part of this clerical excitement and began to be seen as an extension of God -- an outgrowth of His being. Further, it served as a special gift to the people of the United States who lacked the history-filled years of Europe. Getting closer to nature was deemed a moral act and thus the artists who presented the beauty of the wilderness on canvas were "priests of the natural church."¹⁴

Cole rejuvenated landscape painting in the United States, creating a unique American style using the continent's most abundant resource: hundreds of miles of unbounded wilderness. This new approach to landscape art became intensely popular. In the early 1870s, this technique of landscape painting was given the name of the Hudson River School by a newspaper writer due to the fact that the artists implemented it began by painting scenes from the Hudson River Valley region. Cole was proclaimed the father of the school and is considered the only member of the first generation. Numerous artists followed in his footsteps and a second and a third generation of the School evolved. Moran is sometimes referred to as a second generation Hudson River School painter or is coupled with the "Rocky Mountain School."¹⁵ The latter is merely an offshoot of the Hudson River School maintaining the

same attention to detail and dedication to the wilderness, but with its canvases and vistas broader and its pictures based in the Rocky Mountain area.

As these generations of painters grew, the United States did also. Industrialization wove a path through the East creating more cities, populations increased at an unprecedented rate, the Civil War riddled the environment, and Americans looked with mixed feelings at the surroundings they had created. The Garden of Eden in the East no longer existed; the myth had been torn down by mankind's touch. Now the search for the land of milk and honey was transplanted to the West. This new territory was as yet unharmed by humanity. The West became the new "natural church" -- an area "unsullied" by the privations of industrialization and mankind.¹⁶ This attitude was not totally new; the world had always been tantalized with the unchartered West. The myths of this area varied from a desolate wasteland to a marvelous Garden of Eden. As historian, Joe B. Frantz stated:

"The West has been in man's consciousness
ever since the first drunk turned outward
instead of homeward at Jamestown."¹⁷

However, since Christopher Columbus stumbled across the new world, the imaginations of men and women everywhere have been sparked by the mysterious wilds of the North American continent. Those who chose to explore this new world took with them artists and scientists who recorded the unique plants, animals, and terrain. These pictures were sent back home where they were included in pamphlets intended to lure Europeans to the unclaimed wilderness of America. These pamphlets and the stories of returning voyagers were merely a beginning to a myth that would be fostered for many years. The unchartered land of North America was depicted as a paradise teeming with unlimited opportunities just waiting to be tapped.¹⁸ This dream

was eventually transferred to the West and grew to epic proportions, a myth based on ignorance and overzealous misconception. As Americans turned westward, artists also directed their palettes West to find fresh subjects for their work.

Thomas Moran's love affair with painting the West began in the early 1870s, well after the myths surrounding the West were solidly established and reaching their zenith. Moran did not visit the West until 1871, but was no stranger to its beauties. His attraction began when he was asked to stylize some illustrations completed by a soldier who had been on a federal expedition to Yellowstone. This expedition in itself, led by N. P. Langford in 1871,¹⁹ was meant to dispel the myths that had blanketed Yellowstone since the first American, John Colter, saw the area in the early nineteenth century. At Yellowstone, Colter reported that the earth erupted, vomiting forth great torrents of water.²⁰ Moran, intrigued with the mundane sketches, borrowed money in order to accompany the next expedition to Yellowstone. This journey began a warm comradeship between Moran and the West that would last the rest of his life.²¹ Moran continued to paint pictures of the West, encouraged by initial public enthusiasm and also by his love of the subject.

Moran was not the first to give avid attention to the West. Much time and energy had passed to make the West into a monumental myth of paradise before Moran lifted brush to canvas. This image was deeply rooted in social, intellectual and emotional movements. To understand the popularity of Moran's art the cloak of mist surrounding the West must be lifted and the facts be viewed. How and why did this myth of a utopian West evolve?

As the Eastern coast of North America was populated settlers increasingly looked West. Few had been past the Alleghenies and those who had journeyed West brought back misleading reports of what lay beyond the mountains. In 1806 Zebulon Pike returned from his exploration of the West only to state that it was a large

uninhabitable desert, a wasteland. Evidently Pike felt a natural boundary was needed to keep the newly established union of the states solid. He felt that if the population of the States were spread sparsely across America that the Union would break apart. Thus, he incredibly fostered this vision of a desolate West, fit only for the life of nomadic Indians.²² Additionally, the fact the desert contained nothing but arid dirt and scrub brush supported the theory that the soil was not usable for farming. Indeed, settlers usually judged the agricultural worth of an area's soil by the number of trees growing in the area. Due to this misconception farmers were even hesitant to try their hand at plowing the grasslands of such states as Ohio. How could they possibly believe that an area that could barely support grass could be proper farmland?²³

However, there were voices who sang a much different song of the West and their songs combined with many others would drown out the those of doubt. Thomas Jefferson would give spark to his dream of finding a route across the continent that would connect the States to the Pacific. From Pacific ports he believed ships could be launched overseas to trade with the Orient. He dispatched the explorers Lewis and Clark to attain his goal and in 1804 they reached the Pacific. Jefferson's enthusiasm for his dream was supported by his belief in the agrarian future of the United States. Opening the interior of the West offered untold opportunities to the farmer in the form of fresh land to plow and the development of new markets with which to trade. Jefferson also believed that the West should be explored for communication purposes. Not only would the United States trade with the Orient, but in doing so would open up whole new lines of communication with foreign countries. Jefferson believed the future of the United States could be found in the West for it was through here that a corridor to the Pacific could be created.²⁴

Jefferson was not the only individual who wanted to carve new trails to the West. After the 1776 Revolution a new and enthusiastic nationalism prevailed; the

United States was established and its inhabitants were eager to explore their country. The information these men and women had obtained about the West was sparse and sketchy. Maps of this area were compiled mostly from misinformation and filled in with fantasy.²⁵ The only other news available was that brought back by trappers, scouts, and hunters. These men for a time were esteemed as heroes, for they were the few who dared venture into the unknown and dark wilderness.²⁶ However, as the belief in the agrarian dream gained momentum and the West began to be populated, the farmer became the archetype for all that was noble and moral, a symbol of hard work, diligence, and success. After all, he, with his family, hugged the land to his breast, reshaped the bestial wilderness into a home, and brought civilization to chaos. The American farmer believed he had sweated harder and hotter than the European peasant; Europe had been established and settled for many years, but Americans were left the task of carving a home out of the wilderness.²⁷ And so the image of the yeoman hero made an indelible mark on America, fighting against incredible odds to wrestle life from the savage interior of the West. However difficult the battle, there was the promise that he would win out against the hostile forces of nature and claim his bounty. That promise of a definitely better life and ownership of one's own land and home attracted many. A little hard work seemed a small price to pay for a good life.

Opportunities of the American West also enticed Europeans. Brochures and pamphlets sent to Europe were filled with promises of land ownership, independence, self-made wealth, and much more.²⁸ Europeans read novels written by such authors as Gustave Aimard in which outlandish tales of the West's opportunities were exploited. Aimard had been born in Paris, but spent the first years of his life in the American Southwest and upon returning to France, wrote down his adventures. The first of his novels was entitled, Les Trappeurs de l'Arkansas. So popular were these novels with Europeans, they were translated into several different languages. Novels

such as Aimard's which featured glorified and unrealistic tales, further excited Europeans about the American West.²⁹

Additionally, when poverty, unrest, and confusion ruled Europe men and women gained hopes of a new beginning in the untarnished land of America. "The America Letters" probably provided the most impetus for immigration. These letters came from relatives who had already completed the trip to America and were replete with the wonders of the new land and wealth and freedom found there. They served as ample proof to Europeans that success could be found in America.³⁰ Enthusiastic Europeans, nearly 20 million in all during the nineteenth century, arrived in the United States looking for a fresh life and fortune and half of these headed West.³¹ As soon as the immigrants arrived by boat or train, they were met by speculators and railroad agents campaigning for settlement in various states.³² Bombarded with pictures, pamphlets, and smooth talking men who personally attested to having witnessed all the wonders they were describing, these Europeans were preyed upon much like mice by the cat. Caught up in the dream of the American West, they loaded up their families and started journeys to a new home.

Obviously the image of the West as a desolate, barren wasteland did not hold long in the minds of Americans or Europeans. A number of forces worked to change this overstated misconception. In addition to writers and speculators, new waves of intellectualism pervaded America. The West promised a new frontier within which to experience the individualistic, free feelings of romanticism. The "Romantic Movement" evolved in the last two decades of the eighteenth century and eclipsed approximately seventy years later. A reaction to the logical approach of classicism, "Romanticism was the new thought, the critical ideas, the creative or despairing efforts to cope with the insufficiency of the old ways of confronting experience." Classicism could not satisfy the masses ability to deal with such dramatic events as the Napoleonic wars

and the Industrial Revolution. The Romantics believed classicists were as unemotional as the logical, cold world they espoused; romanticism offered the masses an emotional approach to life and the ability to distinguish themselves as important individuals among the growing and dramatically changing world. The West promised a new frontier within which to experience such creative thought and wild individuality. In the wilderness there were no laws or man to hinder one's activities; a person could grow and breath without the inhibitions of civilization.³³

Transcendentalism, the philosophy based on "a search for reality through spiritual intuition,"³⁴ also gave support to the Western image. With the industrialization of the East, the transcendentalists looked to the untouched virginal West. They felt that nature must be preserved so that it may be reflected upon. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a poet and transcendentalist stated, "America is a poem in our eyes, its ample geography dazzles the imagination."³⁵ Thus, the untouched wilderness of the West became important on an emotional level as a means for transcendentalists to find valid truths beyond what they felt to be the harshness of the world.

The promise of cheap farmland further fueled incentive to travel West. The 1860 presidential Republican platform centered around this promise and when Lincoln was made president it was put into action. In May of 1862 the government passed the Homestead Bill promising cheap land for homesteaders.³⁶ Americans were overjoyed, believing that the dream of an "agrarian utopia" was made a reality through law.³⁷ Some settlers believed all they had to do was "simply secure a piece of land,"³⁸ the only payment being in sweat and hard work.

Cheap farmland was not the only treasure the West offered. In 1848, gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill and the rush was on. Thousands traveled across the continent to make their fortune with get rich quick dreams. Not only gold, but other resources such as oil were found to be plentiful. Water, of vital importance in the

desert, became a valuable quantity. Irrigation, which had been used for years by the Indians, was finally implemented by settlers turning the dry lands into a viable resource.³⁹ The timber of the West also became a source of wealth and forests were stripped by lumber companies. Additionally, the raising of cattle on the sparsely grassed plains proved to be profitable.⁴⁰ The opportunities to gain wealth seemed limitless and overwhelming and the masses eagerly traveled West to take advantage of them.

Industrialization of the East had much to do with immigration to the West. The East was becoming crowded, overpopulated, if a contemporary of the period were asked. The first factory had been established on the East coast in the late eighteenth century and many others followed it. Between 1820 and 1860 nearly 30,000 miles of railroad tracks were constructed in the Eastern part of the country.⁴¹ Cities were growing greatly in size and amount of population. And the number of people arriving in the United States continually rose. Even in the early 1820s, Americans complained of overcrowded cities and began moving to the suburbs, a movement not restricted to the twentieth century.⁴² Before 1860 there had been only nine cities containing more than 100,000 occupants, however by 1900 there were 38 such cities.⁴³ In 1869, the first railroad connecting the Atlantic to the Pacific was laid and many chose to use it to escape the city.⁴⁴

The United States was on the move and growing at a rate which created many problems. Sewer systems were ill equipped to provide for their numerous users and so waste and dirt proliferated. Municipal governments did not adjust to rapid growth and so crime bosses flourished and police protection languished. Further, housing could not be erected fast enough to satisfy the population spurts. Families lived piled upon each other in small, hastily built apartment rooms making them unsafe and usually unsanitary. Industry and urbanization which had promised the hope of new

jobs to many, only provided poverty and pain. While lamenting the dismal, dirty, overcrowded style of urban life, many dreamed of an idealized agrarian lifestyle. Still others looked to agrarian life as a new start for prosperity. The city was considered to be unhealthy and inherently evil; a place filled with vice and corruptness.⁴⁵ Americans felt they had to leave the evil city environment and retire to the Godly, healthful country in which they could peacefully reside.

Another incentive for Americans to leave the city for the West was what they felt to be the immigrant menace. As stated before, 20 million immigrants entered the United States during the nineteenth century. Their first ports of entry were in the big cities on the East coast. Americans with their long history of racialism resented what they felt was an overwhelming increase in Central and Southern European populations in their cities. However, over half of the immigrants settling in the United States were heading West, ironically creating a greater amalgamation there than in the East.⁴⁶

The idealized West served as a safety-valve for all the problems of the city. It was an escape which could be fled to for the promise of a new life. No matter how bad things seemed in Eastern cities, the West provided a beacon of hope. It was believed to be a free frontier fostering independence and individuality. Men and women alike went West not only to leave behind the evils of the city, but to experience the freedom of life. Therefore, the West also served as a source of placation for the restless spirits of thousands; people who felt restrained by laws and mores headed where they felt there would be none or they could at least create their own.⁴⁷

A new belief in the spiritually guided path of the American people took form in the 1830s and helped spur settlers West. Manifest Destiny was the belief in the God given mission of Americans to settle uncivilized lands and bring to native pagans Christianity. Included in this belief was the Millennium in which God was coming to

make America his kingdom. The West was looked upon with an additional hunger by certain Christian groups for it was there that the hope of creating this kingdom existed; the eastern half of the country considered already lost to sin.⁴⁸ Men and women headed into the wilderness to create new colonies which were free from vice and sin. Consequently, such colonies as Oneida and New Harmony were formed for this purpose. Even more tempting was the belief that the taking of lands in the West was sanctioned by God. William Gilpin, the territorial governor of Colorado in 1847 endorsed Manifest Destiny saying that Americans should expand "to teach old nations a new civilization."⁴⁹ Good Christians everywhere responded to the call, leaving their middle class lives behind to brave the wilds of the frontier and bring God to the Indians.

Moreover, new reports were coming out of the West. In 1844, Josiah Gregg in his book, Commerce of the Prairies, wrote that settlers in New Mexico believed that as more traders arrived in the area the amount of rainfall had increased. Thus, he felt that the more populated the West would become the more rainfall it would receive. At first, Gregg's statements were largely ignored. However, after the Civil War, journalists touring the West began to send reports back East that rainfall had increased, upholding Gregg's statements. Additionally, in 1867 the Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories headed up by Ferdinand V. Hayden went on its first federal expedition West. Hayden returned from his trip stating that the settlement of more people in western areas led to increased timber growth. This growth in turn he believed led to increased rainfall. Hayden's theories attracted many followers. These people worked to help destroy the desolate image of the West, usually publishing writings on their beliefs of its changing environment after Hayden had returned from any number of his expeditions. Charles Dana Wilbur, one of these followers stated, "Rain follows the plow."⁵⁰ With these seemingly positive changes in the environment,

settlers were encouraged further to travel West. One of the greatest deterrents to the agrarian dream seemed to be eradicating itself through the westward movement of settlers.

The Civil War spurred the movement of Americans also. After this devastating war much of the southeastern environment had been destroyed. Thousands roamed homeless and jobless. The West seemed a logical place to escape. The War left this area untouched and thus it remained unsoiled by the hatreds of humanity. The evils of war had "compromised [the] wonder-eyed innocency" which the Hudson River School had delighted in painting.⁵¹ Americans had to turn to a new area to forget the detrimental powers of human being and their ability to destroy the environment and each other. Moreover, those who had lost everything with the war saw the West as a land of opportunity.

Lastly, the West was looked upon with enthusiasm by a young, growing nation. The United States had only been established since 1776. Only a little over 100 years prior to this, the first Europeans arrived to settle the land. The prideful United States searched for a way to distinguish itself from Europe, which had thousands of years of history to lean on, a long, solid background on which to base its traditions. Americans turned to their most plentiful source and exploited it: the wilderness. Americans believed they were given the unbridled, virgin wilderness by God. The wilderness was a part of God, a place for contemplation and freedom from sin. Europe had no such unchartered areas to claim, the continent had been settled. Therefore, Americans grasped their wilderness and held it tightly, guarding it jealously.⁵²

These are but a few of the reasons that Americans and Europeans alike left behind their accustomed ways of life to begin fresh in a strange territory. The West seemingly held opportunities and wealth that could not be passed up. On the outside the cloak surrounding the West appeared fruitful and productive, a land of milk and

honey just waiting to be enjoyed.

All these reasons also served as an impetus to attract artists as well as settlers to the West. After the Civil War, a “new era of material expansion, with increasing wealth, leisure, cosmopolitanism, and awareness of art” blossomed in the States. The fertile, young United States produced a new upper middle class and an expanding group of millionaires who strove to uphold their aristocratic positions by buying art, thus forming a fresh monetary market for artists.⁵³ It was fashionable to buy expensive art and the wealthy covered entire walls with large paintings.⁵⁴ Moreover, until the 1860s, Americans ignored European art movements, concentrating on their own country and the importance of the unique American wilderness.⁵⁵ However, the eastern half of the country could no longer sustain the image of a free frontier, untouched or unsoiled by the hands of man. Industrialization, overpopulation, and the destruction of the Civil War varnished and made a fact the vices of humanity. Thus, the image of the unsullied, virginal frontier was transplanted onto the West.

Thomas Moran was one of these artists who went West. Moran had already achieved popularity as an artist when in 1871 he accompanied Ferdinand V. Hayden on an expedition to the Yellowstone area. Moran's daughter said she believed her father had “had a great spiritual upheaval” at Yellowstone.⁵⁶ What ever the case, his love affair with the West had begun. While in the West, Moran sketched as many wilderness scenes as he could, making indelible impressions upon his mind of the surrounding area. He also assisted the expedition's photographer, William Henry Jackson and would later enlist the use of these photos in creating his paintings.⁵⁷ This would prove to be the first of many future trips West.

Moran followed much in the style of Cole and the Hudson River School. He never painted his pictures directly from nature believing, like Cole, that outdoor sketches should be made first and the studio where the final picture created. He felt

the resulting landscape would then be painted from those details that stood out most in the artist's mind. At times Moran would combine features from sketches and photographs. He did not believe like that this took away from the validity of the picture, but added to its beauty. Like J. M. W. Turner, Moran's colors were bright and intense, much different from the subdued tones of his contemporaries.⁵⁸ Similar to Cole, he painted in a very detailed manner, each leaf being discernible on each tree and each rock carefully placed. Fostering the wild, uninhibited emotions his paintings inspired was his great interest in changes in nature; Moran preferred colorful, tumultuous, exciting views of the wilderness. Indeed, Moran was almost obsessive with changes and details in his paintings.⁵⁹ He retouched his works many times, some years after they had been completed.⁶⁰ His commitment to emotionally charged, detailed canvases fueled his popularity with the public. Moreover, Moran's pictures expressed the very feelings Americans had for this territory as an area of unspoiled splendor. Americans were hungry for knowledge about the West and Moran was able to give them tangible evidence of what lay beyond the Alleghenies.⁶¹

Upon returning East, Ferdinand V. Hayden presented both Moran's sketches and Jackson's photographs to Congress and asked that the territory of Yellowstone be set aside as a national park. After seeing both sketches and photographs, Congress approved the bill and on March 1, 1872 President U. S. Grant signed it making Yellowstone the first national park in the world.⁶² From hereafter, Moran would be known as the "Father of National Parks."⁶³ Additionally, he was honored by the naming of a mountain in the Grand Teton's with his honor: Mount Moran, which remains to this day.⁶⁴ Thus, Moran's impact on the West was very important and has had much to do with the National Park System. His sketches catalyzed the Federal Government into setting aside land that would be protected and preserved for all to enjoy.

The theme of the untamed, wilderness West also became an important form of

propaganda. In 1873, Moran was asked to illustrate "Picturesque America," an article on the Rocky Mountains.⁶⁵ These illustrations were distributed to the public, giving them a stylized view of the West. This is only one example of the many pamphlets Moran illustrated for patrons such as the railroad and the Federal Government. This type of propaganda made images of the West available to everyone ranging from the wealthy to the poor, hailing all to travel West. Moran's works combined with other artists painting western themes "in part contributed to the consolidation of national attitudes and the implementation of national policy."⁶⁶

One of the first fruits of Moran's trip to the West was his painting, *The Grand Canyon of Yellowstone*. Moran chose to put his painting on a large canvas due to the popularity of the size with the wealthy. The painting was so intricately contrived that those who had accompanied Moran on the expedition said they knew the exact spot which Moran chose to paint. In reality, the picture is a bit turned around with what appears to be a large cliff at the right of the picture in truth being behind the scene. The canvas was immense and awesome and emotionally charged with the wild freedom of the West. So great was Moran's concern for detail that he consulted a geologist to make the rocks in the picture as realistic as possible.⁶⁷ When the canvas was finished, it was presented to Congress and purchased by the government to hang at the Capitol.⁶⁸

In 1873, Moran accompanied Major John Wesley Powell on the United States Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region. His return from this trip resulted in his large canvas, *Chasm of the Colorado*. This also was bought by Congress and hangs along side *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* at the Capitol.⁶⁹ Moran continued to accompany expeditions into the frontier and paint canvases based on the theme of the wilderness West. In fact, it became his major artistic theme. Throughout the rest of his life, he painted numerous scenes of the Grand Canyon, the

Grand Teton, Yosemite, and more.

Unfortunately, the interest of the public and other artists in wilderness landscapes began to wane in the late 1870s. Young artists accused Moran of being outdated and not willing to acclimate to the new trends in European art. Impressionism, with its disregard for detail and the belief in recording the picture as it is truly seen with the eye rather than stylizing it, gained popularity. Moran's art was castigated as far too detailed, contrived, and dull. On the other hand, Moran countered with his belief that American artists should continue their own native art. Further, he felt that those artists who imitated European art were lazy; the Hudson River School style of painting too long and was hard to accomplish.⁷⁰

There were many reasons why the popularity of western landscape painting dwindled. As the realities of the West crept in, the illusions weakened. The West did offer many opportunities for the masses but, was also a dangerous, frustrating area to conquer offering just as many disappointments as rewards.

Pioneers on their way West found a long, difficult route to follow. Many died along the way and when they reached the point of destination, they found they were not prepared for the new environment. Farmers were not informed of or ready for the periodic disasters of grasshoppers, prairie fires, drought, and famine.⁷¹ Josiah Gregg's first claims that rainfall increased with the number of inhabitants were obviously not true; the rain came and went as mother nature pleased. Expecting that there would be hard work involved in cutting their own piece from the wilderness, they thought they would be rewarded with bountiful crops and wealth -- not tragedies. Further, what seemed to be the answer to agrarian dreams, the Homestead Bill, proved ineffective. From 1862-1890, only 372,659 entries for land ownership were approved. Railroads and speculators sold more land to settlers than did the Federal Government.⁷²

Another disappointment to the farmer was that he had in no way escaped the evil of

big business. As the West became more populated the railroad, elevator companies, and steamship lines expanded and were the easiest way to transfer produce to profitable markets. Farmers became even more embittered when newspapers no longer boasted about the esteem of the hard working yeoman, but gloated over the luxurious life of rich city dwellers. Sadly, hopes of glory in the West faded and the farmer became the disappointed lower class. In the late 1870s, Edwin Markham wrote that the farmer was, "humanity betrayed . . . Plundered, profaned, and disinherited."⁷³ The farmer bowed his head and continued to work hard, but no longer did he exalt in the glory of the West, a land that had proved to be just like any other mundane soil with the same pitfalls. The myth for the farmer was broken.

The immigrant was also disappointed. Expecting the same as the American farmer, he was ill prepared for the tests of the environment on his soul. Nor did he find the wealth he was looking for. It has been estimated that only about "3 to 8 per cent of the business leaders at the end of the nineteenth century were immigrants." A very small percentage and surely much lower than the immigrant expected. Further, he had to deal with the racism of the American people.⁷⁴ The immigrant had worked hard to carve a life for himself and his family in a new country -- where were the rewards he was sure he would possess? Again the myth was torn down.

Those who had searched for freedom from the restraints of city life soon found many of the same restrictions in the West. Early pioneers demanded armies to be placed in the unpoliced territory to protect them from the wilds and Indians. So, the armies came and with them they built roads, telegraphs, railroads, canals -- lines of communication with the East.⁷⁵ The air of freedom was gone and the western citizen had to bend to the same the laws as the eastern. Moreover, "civilization" was moving West at an accelerating rate. In 1870 the populations of Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado numbered a half million. Within a decade it would climb to 1,600,000.⁷⁶

And it was soon found that where man ventured, he carried his "cultural baggage" with him, much to the dismay of many.⁷⁷

Patricia Limerick has said of mining that "no [other] industry had a greater impact on Western history." However, the wealth promised from the mineral stores of the West was elusive to the average man. As soon as these precious materials were discovered thousands made the trek West to make their fortune. Before the average man could benefit from his claim, big business moved in and took over. "Companies and corporations with large labor forces" had the monetary resources and power to push the small man out of the mines.⁷⁸ The rags to riches stories were rarities blown out of proportion and believed by a people eager to find the wealth they thought could make them happy. Once again, though, the myth did not hold true.

Further, the belief that the Westerner was totally independent was a myth. Westerners reveled in the belief that they stood solitary, a powerful, singular force taming the wilderness and bringing civilization to savagery. The truth was that the West could only have survived on support from the Federal Government. As stated before the military was stationed in the frontier to bring protection to settlers and with it brought railroads, telegraph lines, bridges, public works, and much more. Roads were built for troops to travel easily and protect the territory from enemies. At the same time these roads could be used for those making the move West. The government signed treaties with the Indians allowing safe living and travel for pioneers. They also opened trading posts, spurring the economy of the area. The presence of many troops in the West alone created a new market for the settler to cater to.⁷⁹ Additionally, the Federal Government provided the West with vast amounts of monetary support which has lasted well into the twentieth century.⁸⁰ Thus, the West was far from independent. Without government aid, it most likely would not have developed as quickly. Another myth fostered about the West was just that -- a myth. The "ideal of economic

independence was elusive."⁸¹

Those Christians who had ventured out to prepare a new land for the coming of Christ were never gratified. The Millennium did not come. These people tried to create a world bereft of sin, filled with grace and love, but sinful civilization followed them. God never arrived, at least physically, and many groups -- New Harmony, Oneida -- disbanded, some heading back East. The myth of the West as the new Garden of Eden evaporated by the 1890s.⁸²

With better transportation and communication systems, Americans looked to Europe as the source of fashion and culture, the West no longer holding fascination. The United States was a thriving industrial country, rich and sure, no longer feeling the need to vindicate itself to Europe. With fading enthusiasm for the West, the art of Thomas Moran also fell from popularity. However, until his death in 1926 he continued to faithfully travel West and paint landscapes, the last fifteen years of his life totally devoted to this.⁸³ Moran truly loved the West, his interest not wavering with fade or fancy. He painted and repainted western scenes, especially the Grand Canyon, which was his favorite. In 1908, the Santa Fe railroad chose one of Moran's Grand Canyon scenes to be lithographed. The end result was sent to "clubs, hotels, stations, schools, colleges, and universities" across the United States. Now, more than ever, Moran was associated by all with the American West.⁸⁴

In 1890, the Superintendent of the Census Bureau stated that the western frontier no longer existed, but its memory lived on. As the nineteenth century came to a close, Americans looked eagerly forward to a new beginning embodied in the twentieth. The dawning century held untold progress, yet that same progress was also firmly dissipating the myth of the West. Americans grieved for the loss of the West and in doing so added more support to the myth -- the West had been a Garden of Eden which had been destroyed by mankind's hands.⁸⁵

Many powerful forces had worked to build the western myth into monumental proportions and the ghosts left from it's death have continued to thrive into the present day. The myth of the West still enthralls Americans. Cowboys and Indians currently ride across the silver screen, hearkening us back to "the good ole days." The myth forged many years ago by explorers, trappers, writers, and the like became so strong that not even the uncovered facts dented its credibility for long. Moran himself helped to foster this myth by returning East and painting "great candy-coated, wispy confections . . . " of the West.⁸⁶ His paintings were not lies, but glorified truths and Americans greedily devoured them. Americans will always hold the myth of the West dear to their hearts, no matter that it does not have a factual leg on which to stand. The West is a symbol of the courageous, independent, and hard-working American, and facts will do little to overshadow its image in the minds of the American people.

- ¹ Thurman Wilkins, Thomas Moran: Artist of the Mountains (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 35.
- ² Robert G. Athearn, The Mythic West (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), p. 249.
- ³ Fritiof Fryxell, ed., Thomas Moran (New York: East Hampton Free Library, 1958), p. 4.
- ⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 4-6.
- ⁵ *Ibid*, p. 5.
- ⁶ Wilkins, p. 30.
- ⁷ Fryxell, pp. 6-7.
- ⁸ Lawrence Gowing, Turner: Imagination and Reality (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), p. 9.
- ⁹ *Ibid*, p. 7.
- ¹⁰ Milton Brown, Sam Hunter, John Jacobus, Naomi Rosenblum, and David M. Sokol, American Art (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1979), p. 193.
- ¹¹ Wilkins, p. 40.
- ¹² Michael Kitsen, Claude Lorrain: Liver Veritatis (London: British Museum Publications, 1978), p. 25.
- ¹³ Fryxell, p. 9.
- ¹⁴ Barbara Novak, Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.9.
- ¹⁵ Brown, Hunter, Jacobus, Rosenblum, and Sokol, p. 217.
- ¹⁶ Novak, Nature and Culture, page 151.
- ¹⁷ Joe B. Frantz, Aspects of the American West (College Station and London: Texas A & M University Press, 1976), p. 48.
- ¹⁸ Ray Allen Billington, Land of Savagery. Land of Promise (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1981), p. 59.
- ¹⁹ Wilkins, p. 58.
- ²⁰ Frantz, pp. 21-22.
- ²¹ Wilkins, p. 58.
- ²² Patricia Nelson Limerick, Desert Passages (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), p. 16.
- ²³ Henry Nash Smith, Virgin land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 175.
- ²⁴ Smith, pp. 17-21.
- ²⁵ John Francis McDermott, ed., The Frontier Re-examined (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1967), p. 50.
- ²⁶ Ray Allen Billington, The American Frontier (Washington D.C.: Service Centers for Teachers of History, 1958), p. 8.
- ²⁷ Smith, p. 135.
- ²⁸ Billington, Land of Savagery, p. 61.
- ²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 41.
- ³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 69.
- ³¹ *Ibid*, p. 59.
- ³² *Ibid*, p. 61.
- ³³ Halsted, John B., Romanticism (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), pp. 1-3.
- ³⁴ David B. Grualnik, ed., Webster's New World Dictionary (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1977), p. 634.
- ³⁵ Billington, The American Frontier, p. 5.

- ³⁶ Smith, p. 189.
- ³⁷ Smith, p. 170.
- ³⁸ Limerick, The Legacy of Conquest, p. 124.
- ³⁹ Limerick, Desert Passages, p. 21.
- ⁴⁰ Frantz, p. 57.
- ⁴¹ Novak, p. 166.
- ⁴² Ann Cook, Marilyn Gittell, and Herb Mack, eds., City Life, 1865-1900: Views of Urban America (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), p. xii.
- ⁴³ Lyle Dorsett, ed., The Challenge of the city, 1860-1910 (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1968), p. v.
- ⁴⁴ Wilkins, p. 57.
- ⁴⁵ Dorsett, p. v-vi.
- ⁴⁶ Athearn, p. 54.
- ⁴⁷ Smith, p. 200.
- ⁴⁸ Matthew Baigwell, A Concise History of American Painting and Sculpture (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1984), p. 67.
- ⁴⁹ Billington, The American Frontier, p. 9.
- ⁵⁰ Smith, pp. 179-182.
- ⁵¹ Baigwell, p. 126.
- ⁵² Novak, p. 145.
- ⁵³ Compiled by the editors of Art in America, The Artist in America (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1967), p. 15.
- ⁵⁴ Louise Minks, The Hudson River School (New York: Crescent Books/Crown Publishers, 1989), p. 17.
- ⁵⁵ The Artist in America, p. 15.
- ⁵⁶ Wilkins, p. 66.
- ⁵⁷ Fryxell, page 49.
- ⁵⁸ Wilkins, p. 116.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 35-47.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 197.
- ⁶¹ Baigwell, p. 126.
- ⁶² Frantz, p. 24.
- ⁶³ Wilkins, p. 70.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 73.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 95.
- ⁶⁶ Billington, The American Frontier, p. 13.
- ⁶⁷ Wilkins, p. 68.
- ⁶⁸ Fryxell, p. 9.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 10.
- ⁷⁰ Wilkins, p. 222.
- ⁷¹ Limerick, The Legacy of Conquest, p. 126.
- ⁷² Smith, p. 190.
- ⁷³ Ibid, p. 189-193.
- ⁷⁴ Cook, Gittell, and Mack, p. xii.
- ⁷⁵ Frantz, p. 74.
- ⁷⁶ Smith, p. 184.

- ⁷⁷ Limerick, The Legacy of Conquest, p. 90.
- ⁷⁸ Limerick, The Legacy of Conquest, pp. 99-106.
- ⁷⁹ Frantz, pp. 70-74.
- ⁸⁰ Limerick, The Legacy of Conquest, p. 82.
- ⁸¹ Limerick, The Legacy of Conquest, p. 98.
- ⁸² Billington, The American Frontier, p. 13.
- ⁸³ Wilkins, p. 235.
- ⁸⁴ Wilkins, p. 228.
- ⁸⁵ Athearn, p. 10.
- ⁸⁶ Baigwell, p. 129.

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