Shadows in the Forest: Imperialism, Indigenous Dispossession, and the Politics of Wilderness in Nineteenth-Century American Literature

By
Pao-lin Louis Wu

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
(English)

at the
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
2018

Date of final oral examination: May 3, 2018

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Russ Castronovo, Professor, English
Lynn Keller, Professor, English
Monique Allewaert, Associate Professor, English
Craig Werner, Professor, Afro-American Studies
Scott Slovic, Professor, English, University of Idaho

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor, Prof. Russ Castronovo, for his support, kindness, and patience throughout these years. His keen insights and thought-provoking comments on my dissertation have helped me so much in many respects. Thanks to my committee members, Prof. Lynn Keller, Prof. Monique Allewaert, Prof. Craig Werner, and Prof. Scott Slovic, for providing helpful and challenging questions about my research. For Prof. Keller, I would like to thank her for her support and guidance for my first few years. For Prof. Werner, his "Faulkner and Multicultural American Literature" seminar opened a door for me to pursue multicultural studies of American literature. For Prof. Slovic, since we first met in Taiwan in 2006, he has encouraged me to become a better scholar in the field of ecocriticism. For Prof. Rob Nixon, his seminar "Environmentalism, Social Justice, World Literature" broadened my horizons. For Prof. Bill Cronon, his articles, books, and "American Environmental History" class illuminated a path for my research. For Sandra Arfa, Brad Hughes, Morris Young, I would like to thank them for their support and guidance when I worked as a TA, a Writing Center tutor, and an instructor.

Special gratitude to Robyn Shanahan, my beloved graduate coordinator, for her friendship, kindness, and support throughout all these years. With Robyn, the memory of my Madison life will be always full of joy and love.

I would like to thank my friends in the Department of English and at UW-Madison for their friendship at different stages: David Aitchison, Andrew Mahlstedt, Yoon-ji Kim, David Blastrik, Manuel Herrero-Puertas, Heidi Backes, Sungshin Shim.

I would like to thank my friends in Madison, especially Nana, the members of our Movie Club (Cher, Wei, Chunting, Yichi, Tang-hsuan, Elisha, Yulin, Patti, Stephen, Hsiang-kuo, Chao-chun, Chih-ming, Chia-chen, Chiu-ching, Yang), Cheng-hsien's family, Huan-yang's family, Po-yi & Huai-hsuan, Michael & Beth, Yi-cheng & Leona, Yuan-hua's family, Li-fang's family, Ze's family, Lillian, Karen & Daisy & Tsai-ying, Jia-jung, Jia-jia, Tzu-hsiang. Special thanks to those friends who helped me in the critical period of writing my dissertation: Yun Wang, Joseph Chung, Yu-li Prudie Wang. For my beloved friends and teachers in Taiwan and elsewhere, my thanks to their love, support, and encouragement is limitless: Sandy, Benna, Bella, Robbie, Amy, Cerina, Fortuna, Bruce, Lynn, Betty, Judy, Helen, David, Lego, Yi-chan, Ying-ta, and my NTU hard-core mates; Prof. Yaofu Lin, Prof. Mao-chu Lin, Prof. Mei-ying Chen, Prof. Shuei-mei Chang, Prof. Hui-zung Perng, Prof. Shoou-der Tseng, Prof. Janet Chao, Prof. Tien-en Kao, Prof. Yanwing Leung, Prof. Yu-cheng Lee, Prof. Te-hsing Shan, Prof. Ju-ying Huang, Prof. Shao-ming Kung, Prof. Serena Chou.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude and indebtedness to my high school English teacher Mr. Kai-sheng Su who changed my life career forever. To my deep sadness, Mr. Su passed away in 2014. I miss Mr. Su, and he is always in my memory.

Love to my family, my wife Hsiang-i, my sons Zephyr and Reynold, my brother Pao-han, my parents-in-law, my sister-in-law and her family, Tom & Hsiu Li. This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Hung-yuh Wu and Hsiu-Mei Lin.

Abstract

This dissertation endeavors to explore the intersections of the U.S. imperialism, indigenous dispossession, and the cultural construction of wilderness as a human-free, uninhabited space in the works of James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir. By studying nineteenth-century U.S. environmental imagination, this dissertation investigates how romantic and Transcendentalist imaginations of nature have so profoundly affected notions of wilderness, indigeneity, and environmental protection in an international context. The abundant research from the field of environmental history has indicated that the American wilderness is never a "vacant" landscape as these writers imagine it to be. The condition of the wilderness as "unpeopled" is actually the political effect of "de-peopling" the landscape whose history of violence and dispossession is deliberately erased and forgotten. By examining the "Indian Problem" in the nineteenth-century American literature, this project explores how Native Americans are dispossessed by national violence and imaginative erasure. Moreover, this dissertation investigates and denaturalizes those wilderness experiences of white male writers by examining their privileged positions. The deconstruction of all-white, human-free wilderness aims for opening up new possibilities toward more inclusive, multicultural, and transnational perceptions of wilderness experiences and preservation.

By focusing on Cooper's three Leatherstocking novels: *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), and *The Prairie* (1827), Chapter One argues that Cooper participates in the Indian Removal by imaginatively dispossessing the Indians of their homeland. Chapter Two continues to explore how the transcendental vision of nature becomes racialized as a white norm in the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman. By examining Henry David Thoreau's *The Maine Woods* (1864), Chapter Three investigates Thoreau's representations of the Indian and the wilderness. While Thoreau sees the Penobscot Indians through the lens of the romantic idea of savagism, Thoreau rarely recognizes the wilderness as their homeland. Instead, Thoreau constructs the myth of the wilderness as empty space for his imperial imagination. By focusing on John Muir's Sierra Nevada Writings, Chapter Four examines Muir's biocentric view of nature, his white privilege in the construction of a sublime experience, his attitude toward the Indian, and the politics of wilderness. The Conclusion shows an attempt to open up more possibilities toward multicultural and transnational experiences of wilderness.

Introduction

What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry execute, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization and religion?

Andrew Jackson, "On Indian Removal" (1830)

That the tract of land in the Territories of Montana and Wyoming…is hereby reserved and withdrawn from settlement, occupancy, or sale under the laws of the United States, and dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people; and all persons who shall locate or settle upon or occupy the same, or any part thereof, except as hereinafter provided, shall be considered trespassers and removed therefrom.

Yellowstone National Park Protection Act (1872)

National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst.

Wallace Stegner, "The Best Idea We Ever Had" (1998)

Cilan, a remote mountainous area in Yilan County in northeastern Taiwan, is now famous for its "shenmu" (divine trees). There are hundreds of rare spectacular trees; among them, the oldest one is called Confucius, about 2600 years old, with its height of 41 meters (about 135 feet). The magnificent tree also has a scientific name: *Chamaecyparis formosensis* (the Taiwan cypress). Named by a Japanese scientist in 1901 during the colonial period (1895-1945), the Taiwan cypress is endemic to the island where it grows mostly in the central mountains at moderate to high altitudes of 1000 to 3000 meters.

Because of its precious value as timber, the Japanese colonial government and later the Chinese Nationalist government had cut hundreds of the Taiwan cypress for profits, which contributed to its current status as one of the endangered species in the world. The Japanese used the treasured timber to build their sacred temples, for example, the majestic *torii* (traditional Japanese gate) in front of the Meiji Shrine in Tokyo. In order to alleviate their guilt over cutting down such ancient and grand trees in the colony of Taiwan, the Japanese, due to their *Shinto* belief with a spiritual view of nature, even built a "Tree Spirit Pagoda" on Alishan Mountain in central Taiwan in 1935. Following the Japanese, the Nationalist government felled many additional Taiwan cypress for money up until early 1980s as if the "divine trees" were inexhaustible resources for exploitation. However, the mountains are far from an empty place for humans to plunder its resources. In fact, both the Japanese and the Nationalist governments just invaded and expropriated the homelands of the aborigines, demonized the indigenous people as "barbarian," and exploited natural resources in the name of progress. Nevertheless, for thousands of years, the Atayal people, the major tribe among different other tribes, have inhabited Taiwan's mountainous "wilderness."

In 1998, Chun-biao Chen, an environmental activist, found out that the Veterans Affairs Council whose responsibility was managing the forest in the Cilan area cut down standing trees in order to create fallen trees as habitat for promoting biodiversity. After this was exposed in the media, the Taiwan Ecology and Conservation Alliance, comprised of many environmental organizations, decided to protest against the government policy by organizing "National Alliance for Rescue of Cilan Cypress." In doing so, the organizers hoped to stimulate the public awareness about the importance of the Taiwan cypress. In 2002, the "preservationist wing" of the environmental movement petitioned the government and proposed for establishing a national park to protect the rare species of trees.

In 2008, the National Park Planning Committee of the Ministry of the Interior approved the project. The proposed national park, called Makauy National Park[1], would cover 53000 hectares (about 130966 acres), with parts of New Taipei City, Yilan County, Taoyuan County, and Hsinchu County in northern Taiwan. Although the environmental organizations suggested a new form of co-management for the new national park, the Atayal people refused to support the plan. They protested against the establishment of a national park on their homeland. Finally, the plan has been suspended since 2009.

Orchid Island, a small island located off the southeastern coast of Taiwan, is home to the Ta'o people. For them, the island is better known as Ponso no Tao, "Island of the People." Owing to the beauty of the island and the famous traditional ceremony of the Ta'o people like the Flying Fish Festival, the Taiwanese government planned to establish a national park on the island as early as in 1979. However, ironically, since 1982 the southern tip of Orchid Island has been used for the storage of nuclear waste from Taiwan's three nuclear power plants. Without any referendum, consent, and even consultation, the government just built the facility there. The Ta'o people, without benefiting at all from the nuclear power, did not have a say in the decision-making to locate the facility on their home island. Like Native American poet Simon J. Ortiz describes in "Our Homeland, A National Sacrifice Area," Orchid Island has served as Taiwan's "sacrifice area."[2] Even more

[1] Makauy, in the Atayal language, means the aromatic litsea, or "mountain pepper" in Mandarin Chinese. It is a widely used spice among Taiwanese aborigines.

[2] Simon J. Ortiz, a native poet of Acoma Pueblo, explores nuclear colonialism in his poems in *Woven Stone* (1992). In "Our Homeland, a National Sacrifice Area," Ortiz blends poetry and memoir to convey the effects of uranium mining on the Native Americans who worked in and lived near the mines. By disproportionately targeting indigenous peoples, the Cold War nuclear colonialism has transformed native homelands (particularly in the U.S. southwest) into "national sacrifice areas" not only through the practice

ironically, the Taiwanese government still strived to build a "national park" upon a "national sacrifice area." Although the government began to make plans in 1992, the Ta'o people protested against the "national park" on their homeland and successfully suspended the plan. On the other hand, ever since the nuclear waste facility was located on the island, the Ta'o people have protested again and again against it, and they have fought for its removal.

Why do I tell these stories about Taiwan in the beginning of the introduction to my dissertation? My family live in a small agricultural town, surrounded by boundless stretches of rice fields and rural beauty. Since my childhood, my family has loved to go to the mountains and enjoyed the tranquility of the forest. At that time, we had only few national parks in Taiwan and their spectacular scenery had left profound impressions on me in my childhood: Kenting National Park (1984), Yushan (Jade Mountain) National Park (1985), Yangmingshan National Park (1985), and Taroko National Park (1986). In fact, I grew up with wonderful memories of traveling with my family to these national parks. Ever since, I have thought of the national park as a good institution, with its idealized purpose of protecting nature from industrial development and of providing recreation to lovers of nature like my family. I did not understand its history, but I did know there are some extraordinary world-famous national parks in the United States, like Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Yosemite. At that time, I could only wish one day I would be able to visit those magnificent national parks in the United States, a country that invented the national

---

of uranium mining with dangerous working conditions, its cancerous effect on human bodies, and environmental pollutions it has caused, but also by means of nuclear bomb testing and nuclear waste storage. For example, the Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Repository, located near Nevada Test Site in the state of Nevada, is still controversial.

park and spread this gospel around the world. Therefore, when I watched the news that the aboriginal people protested against the establishment of national park on their homelands, I couldn't help but wonder why they did not embrace it. Not until I studied ecocriticism and American environmental history did I begin to rethink seriously about the history of national park and the wilderness protection, from their U.S. context to the global impact of these ideas. By tracing the question back to the historical context of nineteenth-century America, I found that the picture gradually became clearer. In addition, the ongoing study has prompted me to challenge and reconsider my idea of nature and my own relationship with nature, particularly my view of national park as wonderland where I have enjoyed the fruits of wilderness preservation as a tourist. The national park, in my ignorance, had been a de-historicized landscape for its purity, beauty, and sublimity, rather than a space full of human and non-human stories, a homeland inhabited and used by indigenous peoples for thousand years.

My dissertation seeks to explore the intersections of the U.S. imperialism, indigenous dispossession, and the cultural construction of wilderness as a human-free, uninhabited space in the works of James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir. By studying nineteenth-century U.S. environmental imagination, my dissertation attempts to investigate how that imagination has so profoundly affected notions of wilderness, indigeneity, and environmental protection in a global context. In the tradition of American literary environmentalism, these writers have been celebrated for their (proto-)ecological visions in various ways which have shed light on our relationship with nonhuman nature. Aiming for "ecologically correct" messages in a world of environmental crisis in the late twentieth century, American ecocriticism in its early development had been nourished by reading these writers in a way

that they were enshrined in the green pantheon. Based upon this U.S. paradigm of American romanticism and Transcendentalism, ecocriticism has spread its insights all over the world and has been received well in some East Asian countries. However, with its multifaceted growths and global impact, ecocriticism has been challenged and enriched from different perspectives informed by feminism, postcolonialism, globalization, environmental history, environmental justice, Native American studies, Third World literature, and critical race theory.[3] Following this thread, I am particularly interested in re-reading how these canonical romantic writers, in its historical context, conceptualize nature, particularly the wilderness, in terms of "pristineness." My dissertation asks the question: in what way can the history of imperial expansion and indigenous dispossession engage in the cultural construction of "purity" (or "virginity") in the American wilderness? The abundant research from the field of environmental history has indicated that the American wilderness is never a "vacant" landscape as these writers imagine it to be. The condition of the wilderness as "unpeopled" is actually the political effect of "de-peopling" the landscape whose history of violence and dispossession is deliberately erased and forgotten.

By exploring these nineteenth-century American writers and their imaginations of nature in the historical context of Indian Removal and Indian Wars, I hope to understand

[3]In his *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005), Lawrence Buell suggests the term "environmental criticism" replace "ecocriticism" for its more broad and inclusive agenda. However, most new books published after Buell still employs "ecocriticism," perhaps due to its familiarity and convenience in the academic world. In my understanding, the shift from ecocriticism to environmental criticism also marks the politics of what we mean by "nature" and what is the priority of concern: nonhuman nature or disadvantaged humans? The debate between the so-called first-wave and the second-wave ecocriticism is still ongoing in the field.

why the indigenous peoples in Taiwan protested against the institution of national park. What is the problem with the romantic view of nature in the wilderness or national park discourse? In fact, early ecocriticism has been criticized for its normative whiteness, as activist Pat Bryant critiques the U.S. environmental movement: "The Achilles heel of the environmental movement is its whiteness" (qtd. in DeLuca and Demo, 541). Bryant's comment, while critical of the movement's racial homogeneity, has encouraged me to reconsider the privileged but invisible position of whiteness that American nature writers and ecocritics have taken for granted for so long. Inspired by Joni Adamson's *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place* (2001) and William Cronon's "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" (1996) when I wrote my master thesis in 2004, I have been fascinated with pursuing multicultural, if not entirely transnational, voices in my study of American environmental literature. Therefore, my dissertation will inquire into these major questions: What's the relationship between the reservation of American Indians and the preservation of wild nature in the nineteenth-century historical context? In what way does the dispossession of the Native Americans contribute to the myth of "virgin land" and the cultural construction of wilderness? How do these American writers imaginatively remove the racial others from nature in their works? In an era of Indian Removal, Indian wars, and imperial expansion, is the preservation of nature in a new system of national park just simply an environmental issue? How is the wilderness constructed as a white-only space? Are there multicultural perceptions and imaginations of wilderness to enrich our understanding of the relationship between people and nature?

Wilderness has been a significant topic in the field of ecocriticism and American studies. Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967) and Max

Oelschlaeger's *The Idea of Wilderness* (1991) have made outstanding contributions to the study of American literature and culture. However, both writers seem to grant wilderness as core essence rather than a cultural construction in their readings of Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Gary Snyder. In this way, Rebecca Solnit's *Savage Dreams* (1994) and Joni Adamson's *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism* (2001) have opened up new doors for me to consider environmental justice issues, like how white America has exploited native homelands for atomic bomb testing and degraded native lives whose well-being depends closely upon the health of the land. The environmental justice emphasizes that the disparate distribution of power and wealth is often responsible for the unequal distribution of environmental pollution and toxicity. In addition, William Cronon's "The Trouble with Wilderness" has proved very influential on my study, especially when he powerfully argues that the wilderness is not a "pristine sanctuary" distinct from humanity but a human creation, "a product of that civilization." The myth of wilderness as uninhabited land, in Cronon's view, "had always been especially cruel when seen from the perspective of the Indians who had once called that land home" (Cronon 79).[4] By extending Cronon's insights into environmental history through an examination of cultural imaginations, this dissertation highlights the ways in which literature reinforces the ideology making possible the white land grab, the relocation and genocide of Native Americans.

Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950)

---

[4] William Cronon's article on the deconstruction of wilderness has provoked a series of discussion and debate, including special issues of the journal *Environmental History* as well as three edited volumes: *Reinventing Nature?: Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction* (1995), *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (1998), and *The Wilderness Debate Rages on: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate* (2008).

is an important early study on the symbol of the West as "virgin land" in the nineteenth-century United States. Smith's reading reveals how powerfully "symbol" itself can invert historical patterns of cause and effect; however, for Smith, the emptiness of the West itself is not recognized as a cultural construction but an essence. In his "Prologue," Smith describes his work as a study which "traces the impact of the West, the vacant continent beyond the frontier, on the consciousness of Americans…" (4). Near the end of his "Prologue," Smith writes, "creating new states in the dreary solitudes of the West is an enterprise that depends upon the increase of population resulting from agricultural expansion into an empty, fertile continent" (12). Here "emptiness" or "vacancy," as an objective condition, implies a free land, a blank slate open to imaginative conquest and the transformation that a continental empire has been built upon. More than three decades later, in "Symbol and Idea in Virgin Land" (1986), Smith recognizes that "[the] American ideology either ignored the existence of the native inhabitants of the continent or cast them as subhuman foes" (1986, 26). He acknowledges his failure to "comprehend fully the assumptions underlying [Frederick Jackson] Turner's view of American history concerned the celebrated declaration that 'the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain American development'" (1986, 28). As Smith states, "I had acquired an even more important contagion from Turner's conception of the wilderness beyond the frontier as free land: the tendency to assume that this area was in effect devoid of human inhabitants" (1986, 28).[5]

5 By claiming the Virgin Land metaphor entailed U.S. peoples' "collective wish to disavow the historical fact of the U.S. forcible dispossession of indigenous peoples from their homelands," Donald E. Pease asserts, "Virgin Land depopulated the landscape in the imaginary register so that it might be perceived as an unoccupied territory in actuality. The metaphor turned the landscape into a blank page, understood to be the ideal surface onto which to inscribe the history of the nation's Manifest Destiny" (Pease 155, 160). In

Indeed, the American West is never a "virgin land" devoid of the human presence and alterations. It is a way of seeing that has been constructed and perpetuated as normative for seeing nature in its pristine state and thus de-historicizing the land of its human stories.

In the myth of "virgin land," the land of America is constructed as a gendered object to be exploited. Feminism and ecofeminism are helpful for their critiques and insights. Henry Nash Smith, as Carolyn Merchant points out in her *Reinventing Eden* (2003), "portrayed the West's 'virgin land' as a region to be transformed from a great American desert into a garden of the world" (123); "The idea of an Edenic fruitful, female land – waiting to be seduced, plowed, planted, and watered by male ingenuity – gripped the imaginations of settlers and promoters of the American West" (Merchant 125). In *The Lay of the Land* (1975), Annette Kolodny critiques the concept of the "virgin land" by arguing that the land is gendered as feminine for the domination and exploitation by masculine civilization: "the success of settlement depended on the ability to master the land, transforming the virgin territories into something else – a farm, a village, a road, a canal, a railway, a factory, a city, and finally, an urban nation" (Kolodny 7). From this perspective, the "virgin land" is a land to be possessed, surveyed, toiled, and made to bear fruit in the process of fulfilling the American dream and creating an American Eden. If the myth of "virgin land" is invented for the male domination of nature and woman, the wilderness is

---

addition, Jedediah Purdy critiques Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, "[Turner] treated the continent's clearing and development as a natural process, the pageant of universal history, when in fact it was a project of war and ethnic cleansing. After all, the continent was rich and 'empty' only after it was cleared of its first peoples, in a campaign that Turner effectively concealed when he placed the Indian hunter at the head of a pageant of progress, first to follow the bison, next to fade peaceably away before the dawning future" (Purdy 36). Therefore, in his The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest (1975), Francis Jennings contends that "[t]he American land was more like a widow than a virgin. Europeans did not find a wilderness here; rather, however involuntarily, they made one" (30).

constructed as a testing ground for manhood. When the "virgin land" has been transformed into the settlement, the urbanizing process is perceived generally as a threat to true manhood. In danger of becoming soft and feminized, white men must "light out for the territory," for a free and boundless space out there in the American west, "a male domain free of genteel and feminized entanglements of civil society" (Buell 1995, 16).[6] In this view, preserving the wild space in a national park can be interpreted as a gendered desire to protect manhood. After all, the frontier, as Joni Adamson asserts, is a place "unwelcoming to women and dangerous for Others" (Adamson 80).

Since the national park discourse embraces the romantic view of nature, my dissertation is a transnational attempt to examine the romantic and Transcendentalist views of nature. In *Literary Transcendentalism* (1973), Lawrence Buell writes, "Nature as a literary pursuit was an acquired taste for Transcendentalists, sometimes never acquired at all" (Buell 145). Although "Transcendentalists were primarily children of the Puritans, rather than children of nature" (Buell 146), they began to admire nature for its symbolic and spiritual significance at a time when nature was no longer a daily barrier to overcome. In fact, nature became a repository of raw materials for the sole purpose of utilitarian consumption. In *Nature* (1836), Emerson helped change the view of nature by proposing that the spiritual value of nature can inspire the divinity of the human soul. Moreover, as the forests of North America were cleared and destroyed, the Transcendentalists, influenced by the European romantic philosophy, began to associate wild nature with God

---

[6] As Lawrence Buell indicates, "American men have historically written somewhat differently about nature than have American women; that their representations of nature contain misogynist and racist elements (such as the disparagement of settlement culture as feminine" (1995, 16).

and turned to it for inspiration. The Transcendentalists transfigured the "howling wilderness" into a sacred temple of God and a "national shrine"[7] where a sublime experience was encountered and a national identity was constructed.[8] Wilderness, as Jedediah Purdy states, "was the apex of the Romantic view — a nature without people, devoid of production or extraction, set aside for leave-no-trace pilgrims" (Purdy 41). Therefore, Transcendentalism's embrace of romantic sublime in the wilderness and its emphasis on individual freedom and self-improvement contributed to the cultural construction of the wildland as a pure space, a space outside of history and free from the humanity.

This dissertation further investigates the idea of wilderness of American Romanticism and Transcendentalism in light of imperialism and indigenous dispossession. In nineteenth-century America, the prevalent idea of white supremacy, which views the people of European descent as inherently different from and superior to other races like Native Americans, African Americans, Mexicans, and Asians, offers expansionists a compelling motive for building a U.S. empire. In his *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (2004), Eric Love points out, "The overwhelming majority of Americans believed that territorial expansion should be for the principle if not exclusive

---

[7] Angela Miller uses "national shrine" to describe the western wilderness when she discusses Thomas Moran's 1872 painting *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* (Miller 2007, 107).

[8] In their study of American arts in *American Encounters* (2008), Angela L. Miller, et al. states, "Writers like Emerson and Thoreau called upon mid-nineteenth-century audiences to treat nature as a treasure. The seemingly untouched quality of the nation's wilderness distinguished the United States from Europe. The landscape came increasingly to embody what Americans most valued in themselves: an 'unstoried' past, an 'Adamic' freedom, an openness to the future, a fresh lease on life. In time, Americans came to think of themselves as 'nature's nation'" (Miller et al. 241)

benefit of whites. Whiteness served as perhaps the most compelling rationale and justification for all species of territorial aggression" (Love 20). From this perspective, my core argument for my dissertation will be that the nineteenth-century westward expansion of U.S. imperialism is a process of mythologizing/dehistoricizing the American wilderness as pristine landscape by emptying the land of its indigenous inhabitants. The violent "whitening" of a continent that Native Americans have inhabited and shaped for thousand years contributes to the all-whiteness of wilderness that the twentieth-century mainstream environmentalism has celebrated and held to be sacred. The wilderness, as Paul Outka points out, "marks a dehistoricized space in which the erasure of the histories of human habitation, ecological alteration, and native genocide that preceded its 'wild' valorization is, literally, naturalized." (Outka 2). Moreover, as Rob Nixon states, "the American wilderness ideal has entitled an amnesiac relationship toward the Indian wars of dispossession" (245). As a result, to deconstruct and re-historicize the wilderness is of vital importance because in doing so the American wilderness will be uncovered not as a given but as the political effect of the nineteenth-century U.S. imperial expansion and racial exclusion on the basis of historical events, like the migration and settlement of white settlers, land possession and displacement by violence, the violations of treaties, Indian Removal Act, Indians wars, massacres and genocide, the establishment of reservation system, and then the creation of national park.[9]

---

[9] Mark David Spence's *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (1999) is a crucial book for my writing and thinking about the relationship between the creation of national park and the removal of Indians. As Spence states, "The idealization of uninhabited landscapes and the establishment of the first national parks also reflect important developments in late-nineteenth-century Indian policy. Much as the conquest of the West reshaped ideas about wilderness, it also led to the creation of an extensive reservation system. Ultimately, these isolated patches of land came to represent the final

The nineteenth-century United States witnessed the acquisition of huge land by the 1803 Louisiana Purchase and the 1848 treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which had triggered a dramatic movement of immigration into the new territory. The westward course of the U.S. empire, under the imperialist ideology of Manifest Destiny, had justified the Indian Removal Act in 1830 and subsequent Indian wars in the second half of the nineteenth century. Imperialism, as renowned historian Daniel Walker Howe points out, "is a more accurate and fruitful category for understanding the relations between the United States and the Native Americans than the metaphor of paternalism so often invoked by both historians and contemporaries" (421). The United States, whose paternalism treated the Indians as infantile children that needed protection from the vices of the Anglo-American civilization, was actually an empire of settlers with an eye to expanding its territory, acquiring land for homestead and development, exploiting natural resources, and displacing its indigenous population. Thus, in spite of their resistance, Native Americans were forced to choose between extinction and assimilation; either way, they had to leave their homelands for a set of reservations which were usually located on alien, barren lands.

Uprooted and displaced, the Native Americans were romanticized generally as the disappearing race, or in George Catlin's words, "a dying race," primarily because a superior civilization's replacement of an "inferior," "savage," "infantile" culture was deemed as natural, inevitable, and thus validated. In this way, George Catlin is the first person in history to propose the creation of a "national park" to preserve the wild nature and the "vanishing Indians." As George Catlin writes,

> And what a splendid contemplation too, when one (who has traveled these

---

refuge of the American Indian, and by the late 1860s and early 1870s, Americans regarded reservations, rather than the 'wilderness' as the appropriate place for all Indians to live" (4).

> realms, and can duly appreciate them) imagines them as they might in future be seen (by some great protecting policy of government) preserved in their pristine beauty and wildness, in a magnificent park, where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse, with sinewy bow, and shield and lance, amid the fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes. What a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to the view of her refined citizens and the world, in future ages! A Nation's Park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty! (Catlin 263)

In Catlin's view, this "nation's park" serves as a permanent sanctuary for the Indian tribes and buffalo. However, he writes of "the native Indian" in the same way as he writes about the animals. From this perspective, his "park" appears more like a "wild zoo." Moreover, as Mark David Spence states, "Catlin's vision of 'classic' Indians grossly ignored the cultural dynamism of native societies, and his park would have created a monstrous combination of outdoor museum, human zoo, and wild animal park" (11). In order to preserve the disappearing native way of life in its "pristine beauty and wildness," Catlin thinks of the indigenous culture as static and lacking the capacity to adjust to the evolving modern world. In other words, Catlin, a noted painter, intends to preserve a dying culture by "freezing it" as though capturing it on a canvas.

My dissertation project has three goals. First, by examining the "Indian problem" in the nineteenth-century American literature, this project explores how Native Americans become dispossessed by national violence and imaginative erasure. My purpose is to understand how these writers become involved in the literary act of "Indian Removal" by means of their imaginations or transcendental visions. I seek to study representations of

"those dispensable, anonymous, invisible inhabitants" who dwell in "the world within" of U.S. imperialism (Nixon 239). Second, this dissertation investigates and denaturalizes those wilderness experiences of these white male writers by interrogating their privileged positions. Third, my deconstruction of all-white, human-free wilderness aims for opening up new possibilities toward more inclusive, multicultural, and transnational perceptions of wilderness experiences and preservation. While William Cronon, in his critique of wilderness, endeavors to direct our attention from remote wilderness to our backyards and urban environments, I suggest that an inhabited wilderness is still important and worth protection. What we need today is more inclusive, diverse, flexible definitions of wilderness which respect indigenous rights to maintain their traditional lifestyles on their homelands: wilderness can be a place of livelihood and work for people. Do we have to embrace the "antihuman environmentalism" in order to "protect" the environment? Is every human use of nature essentially exploitative? These questions are the ultimate concern of my dissertation project.

Although the frame of this project is nation-bound, my dissertation can be transnational in its influence. From my own experiences in Taiwan, I find that our contemporary environmental movement and literature, partly under the influences of early American environmentalism, still holds a dualistic idea and tends to exclude people from nature: that is, to protect nature from all human uses. First of all, from the Korean War in 1950 to 1978 when the U.S. government negotiated to develop a formal, diplomatic relation with the mainland China, the U.S. had provided economic aids to Taiwan for self-defense and industrial development. As a result, these decades had witnessed the widespread pollution and destruction of wild nature under the banner of economic progress in Taiwan because nature signified only a repository of natural resources for human exploitations.

Second, literary scholars who studied abroad in U.S. went back to teach and began to introduce American Transcendentalism as "new" ideas on the relationship between human and nature. The most important among those writers introduced is Henry David Thoreau. Professor Li-min Zhu, the first scholar who earned a PhD degree in literature from a U.S. university, wrote an important book in Chinese entitled *American Literature 1607-1860* (1963).[10] Yan Zhu, one of his students and also a professor of literature in National Taiwan University, had a chapter on Henry David Thoreau in his book *A Collection of Essays on American Literature* (1976).[11] Li-min Zhu and Yan Zhu both expressed the idea that Thoreau is a practitioner of American Transcendentalism in his simple, self-reliant life in close harmony with nature and in his search for regeneration and transcendence, freedom

---

[10] Zhu, Li-min. *American Literature 1607-1860*. Taipei: Taiwan United Publishers, 1963. Professor Li-min Zhu (1920-1995) received his master's degree in 1957 and a PhD degree in 1965, both from Duke University. His book *American Literature 1607-1860* has been the first single book written in Chinese to introduce American literature to the reading public in Taiwan. There are totally twelve chapters in this book, including one chapter on Colonial Literature 1607-1750, two chapters on Revolutionary Literature 1750-1800, and nine chapters on Romantic Literature 1800-1860 covering these writers: Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, New England Poets, Edgar Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman. It is interesting to note there is no discussion of any woman writers in this volume. Prof. Zhu's book has been significant in its influence because even until today it is still the essential reference book in the introductory class of American Literature in college. Prof. Zhu taught in National Taiwan University and later Tamkang University. Some of his students, like Yan Zhu, Yao-fu Lin, and Zhang-fang Chen will take the lead in teaching and introducing American literature in Taiwan. The second generation has retired during late 1990s and early 2000s.

[11] Zhu, Yan. *A Collection of Essays on American Literature*. Taipei: Lian Jing Publishers, 1976. Professor Yan Zhu's book was written in Chinese as well. In fact, Prof. Zhu's major expertise is Hemingway, Faulkner, and Updike. In his career, he taught American novels. However, under the influences of his mentor Li-Min Zhu, one of his first published articles, collected in this book, was about Henry David Thoreau. Its title is "Thoreau's View of the Rebirth of Man."

and spiritual awakening. Both of them also tackled the influences of Eastern philosophy like Confucianism and Taoism on Thoreau. This cultural approach to Thoreau will later culminate in Prof. Zhang-fang Chen's series of articles and finally his book *Thoreau and China* (1991).[12] This cultural approach had inspired early Thoreau studies in Taiwan with its focus on comparing Thoreau's idea of nature with Eastern philosophical thoughts about nature in Taoism, Confucianism, and Zen Buddhism. With more and more new studies of environmental philosophy introduced from the United States and Europe into Taiwan from the 1980s to the 1990s, people became more aware of the importance of environmental protection, and in this context, Thoreau became the hero of literary environmentalism and environmental movement.[13] In college classroom, Thoreau's *Walden* had been studied for his proto-ecological insights.[14] The Chinese translation of *Walden* also inspired the development of Taiwanese nature writing.

---

[12] Chen, Zhang-fang. *Thoreau and China*. Taipei: San Min Publishes, 1991. This book in Chinese is a collection of Prof. Chen's essays on Chinese thoughts and Thoreau that he began to publish in 1976. Prof. Chen studied the image of Confucius in Thoreau's works, the relationship between *Walden* and Confucianism, Thoreau and Taoism, and the comparison of Thoreau with great Taoists Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu.

[13] The Nationalist government repealed the Martial Law in 1987. From the 1980s to the 1990s, Taiwan witnessed a great transformation from an authoritarian regime to a democratic state. During these two decades, there were many social and environmental movements on streets.

[14] Professor Yao-fu Lin, an emeritus professor of National Taiwan University, is the pioneering scholar in the field of ecocriticism in Taiwan. During his long teaching career, Prof. Lin had studied and taught the American Renaissance writers, particularly Thoreau, Whitman, and Dickinson, and focused on their representations of nature with respect to environmental studies. Another important American nature writer who Prof. Lin studied and taught is Gary Snyder. Generation after generation of Prof. Lin's students became professors and they have taught in many universities. Even until today, these professors are still teaching literary environmental studies in Taiwan.

Translation has played a crucial role in introducing literary ecological thoughts from the Western world, particularly the U.S. Thoreau's *Walden* is a good example. In Li-min Zhu's *American Literature 1607-1860* (1963), he mentions Ji'an Xia first translated "Brute Neighbors" from *Walden* into Chinese in *A Selection of American Prose* (1958). The first translation of *Walden* as a whole book appeared in 1964 while another two versions of the translation of *Walden* showed up in 1965 immediately. Up to today, there are totally about twenty versions of the Chinese translation of *Walden* in Taiwan. This fact can help explain why Thoreau is one of the most popular Western/American writers and has exerted huge influences on the development of environmental literature in Taiwan. For example, Ren-xiu Xu, a famous nature writer and the founder of The Society of Wilderness, expresses his admiration for Thoreau candidly in his book *The Monsoon Forest of Monkeys* (1990): "I have been a faithful reader of Henry David Thoreau, the author of *Walden*. Although I am not able to follow him to lead a solitary life in the forest for two years, I can engage myself in similar but more active life experiences" (Xu 6).[15] In his ground-breaking book *Liberate Nature by Writing: Exploration in Modern Nature Writing of Taiwan 1980-2002* (2004), Ming-yi Wu states, "As in a void, the introduction of Western ecological thoughts [by scholars and translation] will definitely have tremendous impacts [in Taiwan]" (my translation, 179).[16] In this historical context, other important works

[15] Xu, Ren-xiu. *The Monsoon Forest of Monkeys*. Taipei: Yuan Liu Publishers, 1990. Here is my translation of Chinese in Xu's original passage into English.

[16] Wu, Ming-yi. *Liberate Nature by Writing: Exploration in Modern Nature Writing of Taiwan, 1980-2002*. Taipei: Da An Publishers, 2004. Wu's book, based on his dissertation, is the first published book on the study of environmental literature in Taiwan. Moreover, Wu is also a nature writer himself; he has published several books about his observations of butterfly and his nature experiences. He is the editor of *A Selection of Taiwanese Nature Writing* (2003). Wu is currently a professor of literature in National Dong Hwa

translated into Chinese in Taiwan are Emerson's essays (1966, 1974, 1991, 1999, 2001),[17] Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1976, 1983, 1998, 2000, 2001), Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring* (1970, 1997),[18] Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1987, 1998), and John Muir's *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1998). These translations of American works have shaped Taiwanese environmental literature and thinking generally in terms of leading a simple life in harmony with nature, concerning about local environment, developing a sense of place, cultivating an ecocentric attitude against human-centered utilitarianism, and promoting the science of ecology.

The Taiwanese government, when making environmental policies, often has followed the U.S. model: for example, the preservation of wild nature in the establishment of national park. According to the government website, "Since the world's first national park, Yellowstone National Park, was established in the USA in 1872, nearly 3800 national parks have been established throughout different parts of the world. The movement for national park and nature conservation in Taiwan began in 1961 and has since led to the establishment of nine national parks on the island."[19] The national park, based on the 1972

University in the east of Taiwan.

[17] In the translation of Emerson's essays, Emerson was usually promoted as "Nature's Philosopher." If we situate the translation in the context of environmental crisis in Taiwan, it is not difficult to understand American Transcendentalism was first introduced as a "new" philosophy that shed light on the relationship between human and nature.

[18] In addition to *The Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson's other works are translated into Chinese as well, *Under the Sea Wind* in 1994 and *The Edge of the Sea* in 1998.

[19] In his article "The American Invention of National Parks" (1970), Roderick Nash points out that "The Japanese, who began an aggressive campaign for national parks in the 1930s, credit their inspiration to the

National Parks Act in Taiwan, is created for the purpose of preserving "the nation's unique natural scenery, wild fauna and flora and historic sites, and providing public recreation and areas for scientific research" as well as "maintaining cultural assets, providing guidance for the local or indigenous community culture, and the sustainability of local cultures."[20] In order to protect nature from human use, the National Park Law has banned the activities of hunting and fishing essential to many traditional indigenous cultures. By embracing and promoting a vision of "nature" devoid of humanity, the national park administration is the authority that provides "guidance" for the indigenous community about what to do and what not to do within the park. There is no room for the indigenous community to participate, to make a decision, and to speak for their rights on their homelands transformed into national parks by other people's law. In Taiwan as well as in the U.S, to preserve wilderness presupposes an exclusion of humans from nature because the U.S. 1964 Wilderness Act stipulates wilderness as "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not

---

United States example" (735). In fact, the Japanese government passed the National Park Act in 1931. At that time, during the Japanese colonial period, the Japanese government planned to establish three national parks in the colony of Taiwan in 1937: Daiton, Tsugitaka Taroko, Nītaka Arisan. The colonial government even issued stamps to celebrate the event. However, due to the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, the Japanese disbanded the unit responsible for the management of national parks in Taiwan. Until 2017, there are nine national parks in Taiwan: Kenting (1982), Yushan (1985), Yangmingshan (1985), Taroko (1986), Shei-pa (1992), Kinmen (1995), Donsha Atoll (2007) and Taijiang (2009), Shoushan (2011).

[20] The United States National Park Service was created in the Organic Act of 1916. The agency's mission as managers of national parks was clearly stated: "...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

remain." As Ming-yi Wu points out,

> The model of national park, with its main purpose of preserving natural resources and promoting public recreation, has contributed not only to the conflicts between [national park] laws and indigenous communities, but also to the 'Protect or Destroy' controversy because in order to advertise beautiful natural scenery for tourism, the administration has built railroads and planted trees and flowers for sight-seeing tourists. The model of wilderness preservation, in its exclusion of human factors, does not take into consideration the fact that some indigenous cultures still maintain their traditional lifestyles in close symbiotic relationship with wild nature. This is the reason why recently the Atayal people protested against Makauy National Park and the Ta'o people against Orchid Island National Park [in Taiwan]." (my translation, 256-7)[21]

Therefore, the American model of preserving a "pure," "timeless," "unpeopled" wilderness in national park for public "recreation" has been transplanted across national borders from the U.S. to Taiwan.

Wilderness has been a site of political struggle and environmental violence. In nineteenth-century America, the myth of the vanishing Indian contributes to the myth of pristine wilderness while the destruction of indigenous culture causes damage to the

---

[21] Among these debates and controversies, Syaman Rapongan, a Ta'o writer, published an article "Say No to National Park – Speaking of the Ta'o Life Experiences on the Orchid Island" (2000). He takes a stand against the American model of national park because he argues that the Ta'o people who have inhabited on the island for thousand years have developed inseparable cultural ties with the natural environment. However, it is interesting to note that he quotes Carson and Leopold in his discussion of ecology while at the same time he defends strongly the traditional ways of his people.

ecological system. From the beginning, the Euro-American settlers viewed the Indians as a part of the natural world, not human agents making a living by transforming nature. By erasing indigenous agricultural activities and changes on the land, the white settlers claimed that those who have "improved" nature deserve the ownership of the land as property, thus validating their expropriation of Indigenous lands. In series of conflicts and wars during the imperial expansion, the Anglo-American settlers killed, displaced, removed the indigenous population from their homelands. With the close of the frontier and the disappearance of the wild nature, some romantics strived to preserve the "empty" landscape for its beauty, spirituality, and scientific value. In this "sanitized" space, white tourists, mostly male, can enjoy the solitude of nature, or seek transcendental vision in the pristine, sublime landscape undisturbed by any human presence. From this perspective, the presence of some displaced Indians in the wilderness has become "unnatural" part of nature and even a potential "threat" to the tourists. For example, John Muir, the father of American national park, keeps reminding his readers of the safety of wandering in the wilderness in his *Our National Parks* (1901). As Muir writes, "As to Indians, most of them are dead or civilized into useless innocence. No American wilderness that I know of is so dangerous as a city home 'with all the modern improvements.' One should go to the woods for safety, if for nothing else" (470); "And you will enjoy your short views of the great lake and river and canyon. No scalping Indians will you see. The Blackfeet and Bannocks that once roamed here are gone" (479). Muir's words demonstrate what Mark David Spence calls a transformation of "Indian wilderness" to "Indian-free wilderness." The "Indian wilderness" as "an obstacle to progress" for the majority of antebellum Americans had been cleansed of its dangerous "Indians" by killing them off in wars or removing them to reservations, and thus had been transformed into an "Indian-free wilderness" where postbellum white

tourists were able to enjoy a beautiful and sublime paradise. As Carolyn Merchant comments, "While the parks commemorated the grandeur of American scenery, the reservation system removed unwanted people to unwanted lands. While the parks depended on attracting tourists, reservations restrained Indians from bothering tourists" (2007, 168).[22] Therefore, the wilderness in a national park, far from an ideologically and politically neutral space, is loaded with human stories and cultural meanings. Behind the "purity" of the wilderness lies the painful and disturbing shadows of violence, displacement, removal, and dispossession that have helped make an "empty," "unpeopled" wilderness possible.

The purpose of my dissertation is neither devaluing the contributions that these nineteenth-century American writers have made to environmental reforms in the United States nor discounting the possibility that their works still inspire people for their love of nature globally. I find it important, as I begin a study that may seem to some readers an aggressive critique of five of the most influential writers in American literary history, to acknowledge that I am applying the twenty-first-century social consciousness to writers who were products of their own historical times and who were, in certain cases, relatively more enlightened than most of their fellow citizens. It is in fact because of the prominence and the great influence these writers have had on later generations of nature writers and

---

[22] As Angela L. Miller et al. observes, "By 1879, seven years after the Yellowstone region had been designated a national park, a system of military defense was in place to protect the newly created wilderness against the Indians who had previously made their home there. The park system – designated 'uninhabited wilderness' – coincided with the removal of Native people from their traditional homelands, and the creation of the federal reservation system (begun in 1867-8) to manage and contain those who had been displaced. Though valued as symbols of America's western wilderness, the day-to-day presence of indigenous people in the national parks of Yosemite, Yellowstone, and elsewhere was an unwelcome reminder that the nation's self-appointed guardianship of the West was not cost-free" (303-304).

thinkers throughout the world that I find it crucial to point out certain lapses of tolerance and acceptance, particularly in the case of indigenous peoples and their presence in wild spaces, for these limitations have had serious consequences on wilderness policy within the United States and abroad. With all due respect for their cultural importance and their artistic accomplishments, I find it necessary to examine their cultural blind spots at length in this study, so as to emphasize their role in inculcating certain attitudes toward wild places and indigenous societies that continue to have troubling impacts today. My ultimate aim is to open up more possibilities for multicultural and transnational engagement in ecocriticism and to seek awareness of not only our relationship with the nonhuman world but also our relationship with other peoples and their different cultures.

Chapter Descriptions

Following this introduction, my dissertation contains four chapters and a conclusion. Each chapter is anchored in close reading of literary texts. This project is also a cross-genre study because novel, poetry, and prose have helped shape the idea of wilderness in the historical context of nineteenth-century America and have exerted their huge cultural impact on the development of American and global environmentalism in the twentieth century and beyond.

Chapter one is entitled "'Its Forests Were Alive with Men': Nature, Indian Removal, and Settler Colonization in James Fenimore Cooper's Early Leatherstocking Tales." This chapter will focus on Cooper's three Leatherstocking novels: *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), and *The Prairie* (1827). These three novels, though set in earlier historical times, were written in an age when the controversial issues of Indian Removal Act were acutely debated in the society. Read together, these three novels uncover

Cooper's attitude toward the Removal policy and the fate of American Indians. Whether the Indians are romanticized as noble (Uncas, Chingachgook, Hard-Heart) or ignoble savage (Magua, Weucha), they must vanish. Cooper's fictional racial stereotyping of the Indian, I argue, has displaced the white guilt over the deaths and sufferings of living Indians in the Trail of Tears in his own time, thus justifying the land annexations of the imperial project of Manifest Destiny. Furthermore, in these three novels, Cooper also shows the dramatic conversion of wilderness into frontier settlement at the cost of environmental integrity. After dispossessing the wilderness of its indigenous inhabitants to create a "virgin land," the settler colonization has domesticated wilderness, expanded its territory, and exploited natural resources in a reckless and wasteful way. However, as Cooper is concerned with the establishment of law as the foundation of American democracy in the frontier society, he embodies his (proto-)ecological messages in the idealized character of Natty Bumppo who, like a Transcendentalist precedent, sees God in the wilderness and reverences nature as God's work with humility. Even though Leatherstocking represents a lost possibility of a better relationship with nature and other fellow peoples for the American future, he is actually rendered visible as a white man, "a man without cross," rather than an Indian whose displacement and demise seem so inevitable.

Chapter two, entitled "'I Become a Transparent Eye-Ball': The White Imagination and Transcendental Blindness in Emerson and Whitman," focuses on Emerson's works and Whitman's poetry. By examining these two Transcendentalists' white imagination of nature, I argue that their transcendental visions mark their subjectivity as whiteness which contributes to their transcendental blindness because they mistake whiteness as transparency. This chapter explores how white imaginations of nature or America as a "vacant land" become naturalized as a norm. First, I read Emerson's *Nature* (1836) with its

contributions and limitations as an environmental text. By juxtaposing *Nature* with its historical context of Indian Removal and slavery, I argue that Emerson's transcendental experience of nature is constructed as white experience. Even though Emerson reluctantly writes a protest letter to President Martin Van Buren (1838), Emerson is ultimately concerned with the reputation of the United States and the American people rather than the welfare of the Indians. During the rest of his life, Emerson does not speak for the Indians again. Then, I continue to examine Whiteman's poetry. Whitman exploits the literary potential of the Transcendental I to its fullest. His globalizing vision, like the nineteenth-century America's relentless imperialistic expansionism, channels the voices of others through his own voice. He, like a man possessed, embraces all and speaks for them. However, when Whitman speaks for all, he silences all the voices of others. While Whitman conceptualizes the earth in terms of human body and express explicitly anything is a part of the great whole, he also celebrates the technological achievement and material progress. In his poems, like "Starting from Paumanok," "Yonnondio," "Osceola," Whitman envisions that the Indians vanish from the land. In "Song of the Redwood-Tree," Whitman imagines that the ancient trees depart willingly and leave the land "virgin" for a superior race. In the historical context of Indian Wars in postbellum United States, it is difficult not to associate the self-sacrifice of the redwoods with the systematic dispossession of the Indians. These poems show a transcendental vision that turns forced eviction into voluntary relinquishment.

Chapter three is entitled "'It Is Difficult to Conceive of a Region Uninhabited by Man': Romantic Indian and The Myth of Wilderness in Henry David Thoreau's *The Maine Woods* (1864)." This chapter explores Thoreau's representations of American Indians and the wilderness. During his three trips, Thoreau expects to see the Indians he thinks to be

"real" and tries to learn indigenous knowledge from his Indian guides. However, Thoreau sees his Penobscot guides through the lens of the popular romantic idea of savagism. Once Thoreau's Indian guides fail to meet his romanticized expectations, they become "degraded" and thus "doomed to extinction." Furthermore, Thoreau describes the wilderness as unpeopled space by employing a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside nature. Thoreau's imagination of America as a vacant continent erases a long cultural history of Native Americans who have lived and made their homes on the land for thousand years. Throughout the three essays, Thoreau is ambivalent between his criticism of the environmental destruction and his admiration for frontiersmen in the Maine wilderness. Thoreau often embraces wild nature for its integrity and spirituality while at the same time he also favors the signs of human settlement. For Thoreau, the domesticated space of pastoral Concord serves as an idealized middle landscape. Finally, I explore Thoreau's proposal at the end of "Chesuncook" for "national preserves" which actually include people and animals. Nevertheless, in spite of literary critics' general approval of Thoreau's idea, I observe that Thoreau's proposition for preserving the wilderness and the indigenous people in a park for "inspiration and our true recreation" is questionable on account of his presupposition of the indigenous culture as static and the establishment of the park as a museum (or a wild zoo) rather than a home.

Chapter four is titled "'I Was Startled by a Human Track': Natural Theology, Sublime, and the Politics of White Wilderness in John Muir's Sierra Nevada Writings." This chapter examines John Muir's Sierra Nevada writings like *The Mountains of California* (1894), *Our National Parks* (1901), *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911), and *Yosemite* (1912). The major focus is *My First Summer in the Sierra* in which Muir resurrects his journal of the 1869 sojourn in Yosemite. In his writings, John Muir embraces

a Transcendentalist vision that perceives no boundary between himself and the landscape around him. He also invents a language of mystical ecstasy and employs religious imagery in distinguishing Yosemite as a sacred place worth preservation. In this chapter, I first explore what I call Muir's natural theology. By rejecting his father's orthodox doctrine of Calvinism with its emphasis on original sin and its anthropocentric view of nature, Muir has combined Emersonian Transcendentalism with Christianity, and has further made a pioneering move toward a biocentric outlook of nature. Then, I go on to explore the intersection between the idea of sublime and the formation of white wilderness by interrogating a core question: what role does the ahistorical ecstasy of the sublime play in the cultural construction of this normative white wilderness where classed and racial others are excluded? Finally, I examine Muir's representation of the Indian and the politics of wilderness. Muir's view of Yosemite as sublime, unpeopled wilderness not only ignores the fact that Native Americans have inhabited and altered Yosemite for thousand years, but also erases a history of violence, dispossession, and genocide that happened at the locations where Muir's "holy temples" are enshrined.

My conclusion addresses how multicultural and transnational experiences of wilderness can enrich our understanding of the relationship between people and nature in the environmental studies. Following the previous chapter on John Muir's transcendental experiences of his pure wilderness in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in 1869, I explore different experiences of wilderness in almost the same place at almost the same time. From 1863 to 1869, the Chinese laborers worked for building the First Transcontinental Railroad across the Sierra Nevada Mountains. In her story "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains" in *China Men* (1980), Maxine Hong Kingston describes how Ah Goong and other fellow Chinese laborers had worked and endured in a dangerous and inhospitable

working condition in the high Mountains when they built the railroad. Reading the history of Chinese railroad workers, I can't help but wonder about these questions: Did they appreciate the beauty of the landscape? What would Muir respond to them? In addition, my conclusion will also explore the American wilderness discourse from the perspectives of African Americans and Native Americans as new possibilities for my next research project. I also address the consequences of the transnational uses of the U.S. national park model and its idea/ideal of wilderness in a global context. In conclusion, the continent of the United States is not "a world without ghosts"; rather, the landscape is always already storied with human memories and racial histories of colonialism, genocide, violence, exclusion, and oppression. This dissertation is my transnational attempt to read those "shadows in the forest" that remain haunting in those depopulated, dispossessed, and de-historicized landscapes masquerading as "virgin land" or "the wilderness."

Chapter One

"Its Forests Were Alive with Men": Nature, Indian Removal, and Settler Colonization in James Fenimore Cooper's Early Leatherstocking Tales

As a rule the red man disappears before the superior moral and physical influence of the White, just as I believe the black man will eventually do the same thing, unless he shall seek shelter in some other region.

James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans* (1828)

Can you make a land virgin by killing off its aborigines?

D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923)

This chapter focuses on James Fenimore Cooper's three Leatherstocking novels: *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), and *The Prairie* (1827). Although Cooper sets his three novels in the period between the Seven Years' War and the Louisiana Purchase, he wrote them in an age when the controversial issue of Indian Removal Act was hotly debated. Read together, these three novels reveal Cooper's attitude toward the Removal policy and the fate of American Indians as a whole. Whether the Indians are romanticized as noble (Uncas, Chingachgook, Hard-Heart) or ignoble savage (Magua, Weucha), they must vanish. Cooper's fictional racial stereotyping of Indians, I argue, displaces white guilt over the deaths and sufferings of living Indians in the Trail of Tears, thus justifying the imperial land annexations of Manifest Destiny. In his novels, Cooper is concerned with the competing legal, moral, and historical claims to the American continent. Cooper creates a national myth that the new Republic is built on a "virgin land," an unpopulated wilderness, where a superior civilization replaces a backward, inferior, and "savage" race and claims its "indigenous" identity with the land by "improving" it.

Therefore, the ideological construction of the opposition of civilization and savagism developed in these novels serves as the rationale for the westward expansion of the United States throughout the nineteenth century.

In this chapter, I read these three novels in a chronological manner in order to demonstrate the historical process from indigenous dispossession (*The Last of the Mohicans*), through a post-removal frontier society (*The Pioneers*), to the westward expansion (*The Prairie*). I argue that Cooper participates in the Indian Removal by imaginatively dispossessing the Indians of their homeland where a new Republic establishes itself, sets up social institutions, expands its territory, and claims its innocence. In his novels, Cooper's romanticized representations of the Indians as either noble or ignoble savages serve to displace the white guilt over the inevitable fate of the Indian as a vanishing race, particularly in the historical context of Indian Removal and imperial expansionism. In this view, Cooper's novels show the United States as a settler colonial society. In the current study of settler colonialism, a key element is the displacement of the indigenous inhabitants by emigrant European settlers whose purpose is not to exploit native labor but to expropriate the land.[1] Therefore, as Cooper's novels demonstrate, after the Anglo-American settlers have dispossessed the indigenous people of their homeland to create a "virgin land" for their purpose of occupation and settlement, they begin to convert the wilderness into the fruits of civilization at the cost of environmental integrity.

In my reading, I juxtapose *The Last of the Mohicans* with the Puritan wilderness

[1] Settler colonialism, according to Dean Itsuji Saranillio, "describes a historically created system of power that aims to expropriate Indigenous territories and eliminate modes of production in order to replace Indigenous peoples with settlers who are discursively constituted as superior and this more deserving over these contested lands and resources" (Saranillio 284).

discourse by arguing that their representations of the Indians as savage others serve to justify the settler colonial project of indigenous removal and land seizure. Moreover, the wilderness is constructed as a foreign space full of risks of physical danger and spiritual degeneration that further validates its violent conquest. *The Pioneers*, in my view, represents a post-removal society in which the settlers are engaged in transforming the "unpeopled" wilderness into frontier settlements by exploiting natural resources in a reckless and wasteful way. From this perspective, Cooper's representations of the Indian as a stereotype have allowed him to lament the environmental destruction but not the devastation of the indigenous people who have inhabited the land. Moreover, as Cooper is concerned with the establishment of law as the foundation of American democracy in the frontier, he has embodied his (proto-)ecological messages in the idealized character Leatherstocking (Natty Bumppo) who, like a Transcendentalist precedent, recognizes the spiritual value of nature and respects nature as God's work with humility. Leatherstocking, in *The Pioneers* and *The Prairie*, represents a pioneering voice for his environmental ethics in the development of American literary environmentalism. In *The Prairie*, Cooper further explores the environmental consequences of U.S. westward expansion and the fate of the United States as a nation. For Cooper, Leatherstocking serves as a "white noble savage" to meditate on social and environmental conditions of America in his time. However, even though Leatherstocking represents a lost possibility for the American future in terms of his proto-ecological vision, he is actually visible as a white man, "a man without a cross," rather than an Indian whose demise is so inevitable in Cooper's novels.

Cooper romanticizes the Indian as an object of contemplation that provides an imaginative space for reflections on the present and future of America and the meaning of national identity. In the nineteenth-century cultural imagination, the American Indian exists

in light of Rousseau's "noble savage" and the idea of savagism, which underscores the inherent inferiority and barbarianism of the indigenous people and thereby validates the European and later Anglo-American conquest. These stereotypes create a sense of tragedy over the inevitable extinction of the "good" Indian, like Uncas in *The Last of the Mohicans*, and they have provided a God-ordained excuse to exterminate the "bad" Indian, like Magua. Given Cooper's reputation as "the analyst and the visionary of American conditions" (Chase 46), it is significant to note that Cooper is actually interested in the Indian not for the Indian's sake but for the Indian as a symbol with respect to its relationship to the white civilization.[2] In other words, Cooper's Indian is the mythology he invents deliberately for his fictional purposes.[3] As Richard Slotkin states, "Cooper's Indians are a metaphorical rendering of the pattern of our own civilization, reinforcing the suggestion that in the Indian we see the primitive germ of our own character and fate" (1986, xxiii). The mythologized image of the Indian reveals more about a white culture whose identity is torn between a symbolic attraction to nature and a devotion to agricultural transformation, between a romantic appeal for innocence and simplicity and an inferior sense of lacking European cultural sophistication, between a desire to claim "indigeneity" and a hatred of the Indian

---

[2] Cooper's interest, as Roy Harvey Pearce indicates, "is not in the Indian as Indian, but in the Indian as a vehicle for understanding the white man, in the savage defined in terms of the ideas and needs of civilized life" (Pearce 202).

[3] As Angela E. Miller et al. illustrates, "Eastern audiences, themselves more than a century removed from conflict with Native cultures, dealt with their own moral misgivings about their government's destructive Indian policy by sentimentalizing the whole idea of the Indian. Yet unlike the humane reaction to slavery, the figure of the idealized Indian did not produce any significant protest until nearly half a century later. According to the myth of the "vanishing" American Indian, to protest his fate was to protest the course of nature itself, and equally pointless. The figure of the vanishing Indian who offered a measure of American progress" (2008, 222-3).

as the other.

Cooper's fictional stereotypes of his Indian characters disclose his lifelong concern with and his deep anxiety over the ownership of the American continent. As Renée L. Bergland states, "The history of European relations with Native Americans is a history of murders, looted graves, illegal land transfers, and destructions of sovereignty. Among these, land ownership may be the source of the nation's deepest guilt" (Bergland 8). In his response to the national guilt, Cooper's attitude toward the vanishing Indian is philanthropically romantic and patronizingly sentimental. In Cooper's view, the Indian's destiny toward extinction is ordained by God or some divine principle of progress: "The prophecies of extinction made the wish for white conquest and domination into a cosmic inevitability" (Sayre 8). In other words, Cooper's literary construction of such an inevitable fate for the American Indian has naturalized a history of violence and genocide as if the Indian's extinction was a part of natural process. However, Cooper is ambivalent toward the westward movement. He is concerned not with the Indians or their mistreatment, but with the establishment of a civil society in the frontier. He is also worried whether a new class brought about by a rapidly changing society would replace the old landed gentry class like his father and himself. As to the Indian, Cooper does not speak for them in his novels; rather, he employs the Indian as a stereotype to address white guilt over the displacement and removal of Native Americans. His true concern is the moral character of the United States as a nation.[4]

---

[4] In her book *The Insistence of the Indian: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (1998), Susan Scheckel states, "Indians mattered during this period not primarily as a physical or political threat to the American nation but as a threat to Americans' sense of themselves as a moral nation – a threat, in short, to American national character and legitimacy" (6-7).

The idea of Manifest Destiny had provided white Americans with the prevailing belief in progress. It was the American mission to "improve" and redeem the boundless wild land with their agrarian virtues. Manifest Destiny aimed to people the "virgin land" with a superior race across the continent.[5] The "Indian problem" and the subsequent wars during the westward movement were based upon the belief that God had willed the Indian's land for their use. As John Carlos Rowe illustrates,

> Manifest Destiny proved to be our own "Final Solution" to the 'problem' of native peoples, which is also relatively unique in modern imperialisms: that the purpose of territorial expansion is not to subjugate native peoples for the purposes of exploiting their labor but simply to remove them from useful colonial territory with the ultimate purpose of eliminating them and their lifeways altogether. (Rowe 10)

The purpose of Manifest Destiny is the expropriation of the "useful colonial territory." As a result, the Indian Removal Act was merely one of a series of the United States government policies to take possession of Indian lands. The expulsion of native population to a new set of reservations in the West created vast vacant and cheap lands for sale in the market.[6] Manifest Destiny had provided a rationale for the extermination and dispossession of the Indians.

The theory of settler colonialism is useful to understand the U.S. postcolonial

---

[5] As Mark David Spence points out, "Americans had a moral and biological duty to extend the Anglo-Saxon 'race' over the western half of the continent and either subjugate or extinguish the inferior 'racial strains' that currently occupied these lands" (Spence 1996, 28).

[6] As Daniel Walker Howe states, "settlers and land speculators wanted to buy cheap from the government and sell dear to later arrivals" (Howe 367).

society after the Revolution. However, to include the United States in the postcolonial studies does not address its status as an imperial power. In fact, 1776, when the thirteen colonies declared their independence, did not mark the end of the colonizing process in the new country.[7] In its postcolonial status, the United States became a neo-colonizing power expanding across the continent due to its condition of settler colonialism. However, historical denial has contributed to the controversial study of the United States within the context of both settler colonialism and imperialism. From this perspective, the United States as a settler colonial society and a new imperial power has become an inconvenient truth.[8] Interestingly, in his *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (2009), historian Daniel Walker Howe illustrates,

> Antebellum Americans did not shrink from calling their continental domain an "empire." Thomas Jefferson looked forward to creating an "empire for liberty" that would include Cuba and Canada. In this empire he expected white family farming to have room to expand for generations to come, and the economic basis for Jefferson's ideal republic would be preserved against historical degeneration. (Howe 703)

According to Howe, for nineteenth-century Americans, the United States was an empire in the making. Since settler colonialism aims at the appropriation of indigenous lands, the U.S. "empire" expanded its territory from sea to sea by removing Native Americans to far

---

[7] As Amy Kaplan states, "[a]n enduring assumption that the American struggle for independence from British colonialism makes U.S. culture inherently anti-imperialist. (1993, 12).

[8] In his book *The New American Exceptionalism* (2009), Donald E. Pease points out, "The fantasy that permitted U.S. citizens to achieve their national identity through the disavowal of U.S. imperialism was American exceptionalism" (Pease 20).

less desirable lands called “reservations” throughout the nineteenth century.

I. The Last of the Mohicans (1826)

The Last of the Mohicans (1826) is set in 1757, during the French and Indian War, when two European imperial powers battled for the control of North America. During the war, both the British and the French used Native American allies to fight bloody wars in North American wilderness. *The Last of the Mohicans*, as Edwin Fussell states, is “most unrelenting bloody, cruel, and savage” (40) among all the five books of Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales. It is also important to note that Cooper wrote *The Last of the Mohicans* in the historical context when the American society began to debate the fate of Native Americans and the Indian Removal policy. By writing a history not long past in the genre of historical novel, Cooper provides his comments on the present issues. As, John P. McWilliams states, “A historical novel’s portrayal of a past conflict, precisely because it is both powerful and widely known, can influence many readers’ attitudes coward present crises in which the same conflict recurs” (1998b, 399). Therefore, in this section, I read *The Last of the Mohicans* together with the Puritan wilderness discourse. I argue that many connections between *The Last of the Mohicans* and the Puritan wilderness discourse reveal their common ground in which the wilderness, replete with unknown dangers, must be “improved” by the civilization. As to the “savage” and “devilish” others who dwell in the wilderness, they must disappear from the landscape and the American psyche.[9]

[9] Owing to Cooper’s longstanding concern to justify white settlers’ possession of the land, literary critics have focused on two major aspects of the novel to interpret how Cooper removes the Indians imaginatively. The first is a historical approach. Literary critics, like Robert Clark and John P. McWilliams, argue that Cooper creates an artful confusion about respective indigenous alliances and rewrites the history of the alliances during the French and Indian war. By shifting the friendly Indian nations to hostile and distorting

The wilderness, for the Puritans and in *The Last of the Mohicans*, is a strange, dangerous place where humans feel insecure and insignificant. When the Puritan settlers

---

historical allegiances, Cooper strives to alleviate the national guilt over those indigenous nations who had sided with the Americans during the Revolution but were later dispossessed of their homelands. Cooper, along with his readers, laments the inevitable demise of the Indian. In his *History and Myth in American Fiction, 1823-52* (1984), Robert Clark contends that "Cooper's representation of the Iroquois as the most savage of Indians and his tendency to displace them into allies of the French and Hurons, results from two factors: from the need to repress knowledge of their cultural attainments so that the ideology of expansion may remain unquestioned, and from the desire to remove them from their homelands so that the patriarchal estate would appear to have been a wilderness before the arrival of the white man" (Clark 87). For John P. McWilliams' similar comments, please refer to his *The Last of the Mohicans: Civil Savagery and Savage Civility* (1995).

The second approach is sexuality, or Cooper's attitude toward miscegenation. By focusing on the failed possibility of the marriage between Uncas and Cora, critics argue that the future of Cooper's American society belongs only to the white. Quite a few critics have commented on Cooper's arrangement of the death of Uncas and Cora at the end of the novel, and his attitude toward miscegenation. For example, to Stephanie Wardrop, "Cooper's narrative presents a world in which the mixture of races is morally repugnant and anathema to the American project of nation building" (Wardrop 62). In her *"Miscegenation": Making Race in America* (2002), Elise Lemire contends that "[t]he project of Cooper's novel was to naturalize white intra-racial preference with a rhetoric of blood, not so as to solely help prevent Indian/white mixing — after all, most of those people imagined as 'the Indians' had already vanished from the Northeast — but any 'crossing' with whites" (Lemire 50). Harry J. Brown, in his *Injun Joe's Ghost: The Indian Mixed-Blood in American Writing* (2004), pays attention to Cooper's use of gothic language: "Less immediately obvious than Cooper's insistence on racial separation and almost wholly ignored by scholars is the gothic language with which he articulates these theories of racial degeneracy" (Brown 47). In her *Race Mixture in Nineteenth-Century U.S. and Spanish American Fictions Gender, Culture, and Nation Building* (2004), Debra J Rosenthal concludes that "[r]ace mixture in *The Last of the Mohicans* proves undesirable, and Cora and Uncas die to preserve a legacy of unmixed whiteness for those who will dominate the United States" (Rosenthal 30). Allan M. Axelrad, in his "*The Last of the Mohicans*, Race Mixing, and America's Destiny" (2011), points out, "In the reading that I believe Cooper intended, the deaths of the triracial couple, Cora and Uncas, and the pending extinction of the Mohicans, emblematic of the larger displacement of indigenous people, raise deeply troubling doubts about the moral foundation, integrity, and legitimacy of a republic founded on racist beliefs and racial oppression" (Axelrad 2011, 48).

set sail across the Atlantic in the fifteenth century, they brought with them a preconceived notion of what they would encounter in the New World. They employed biblical typology to view themselves and the land of North America: "Their story was compared to the biblical Exodus, when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and into the wilderness of Sinai. After wandering for forty years, they reached the new Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Merchant 2003a, 99). However, what the Puritans really encountered in the New World was not "a land flowing with milk and honey" but a "howling wilderness," a place of sin and degeneracy. As William Bradford states in his *Of Plymouth Plantation*: "Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men" (Bradford 62). For these early settlers, the New World wilderness is not an Eden on earth, but rather an inhospitable wasteland that requires human toil to turn it into a paradise regained.[10]

In *The Last of the Mohicans*, the wilderness plays a similar role in obstructing Europeans' physical movement and testing their spiritual endurance. The wilderness functions as the third power, a powerful natural force located between the French and the British imperial powers: "It became, emphatically, the bloody arena, in which most of the battles for the mastery of the colonies were contested" (16). The natural world is depicted as wild, magnificent, dangerous, and uncontrollable. As Cooper describes early in the novel, "It was a feature peculiar to the colonial wars of North America, that the toils and dangers of the wilderness were to be encountered before the adverse hosts could meet. A wide and apparently an impervious boundary of forests severed the possessions of the hostile

[10] For the Puritans, the wilderness is "a place of exile and punishment, and unimproved, un-Christian, and generally hostile wasteland with value only in its possibility of being converted into something else: a divine city on a hill, forts, towns, crops, money" (Paul Outka 28).

provinces of France and England" (15). From the beginning, the image of a hostile wilderness has filled the pages: "the forest at length appeared to swallow up the living mass which had slowly entered its bosom" (20); "Though we are not in danger, common prudence would teach us to journey through this wilderness in as quiet a manner as possible" (32). For Cooper, nature is not only the framework of the novel but a significant character. Therefore, as the European powers and their indigenous alliances are engaged in bloody conflicts and battles, the wilderness, far from an "empty" space, is a landscape full of humans and their stories.

Although William Bradford had found the New England forest "full of wild beasts and wild men," the men who were said to live there were deemed hardly to be men at all. Instead of recognizing that the native inhabitants had a different culture, the European settlers considered them inferior barbarians who lived no better than animals.[11] Native Americans, in the Puritan's mind, are thus portrayed as "subhuman degenerates" lurking in the wilderness, whose ancestry has diabolic origins. Such negative images, as Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and James Arthur Levernier claim, embody the "archetypal racist stereotypes traditionally used as propaganda against enemies of Western cultures during periods of war, conquest, and domination" (63). Therefore, to label a people "savage" not only enables subjugation but also justifies the necessary violence and domination imposed on the resistance of the indigenous people.

The Puritan settlers often described the New World "howling wilderness" with the word "desolate" which means "barren" or "deserted" from its allusion to the Biblical desert. Even though the wilderness contains "wild men," the settlers still view the land as "virgin,"

---

[11] As Michael Green states, "The savage, being uncultured, could best be understood in terms of animal and animal behavior" (Green 327).

an unpopulated land of pure nature. "In the American and more generally in the colonial context, what was beyond settlements was seen as 'empty.' In this form of unseeing, the territory was represented as devoid of human imprint, as inhuman. The land became ipso facto available, even urgently calling for human presence" (Harding 11). For example, John Cotton, in his lay sermon "God's Promise to His Plantations" from 1630, describes that settlers could declare the land as their own because it was uncultivated. The wilderness was an empty continent, free land available for European settlers: "In a vacant soyle, hee that taketh possession of it and bestwoeth culture and husbandry upon it, his Right it is. …If therefore any sonne of Adam come and finde a place empty, he hath liberty to come, and fill, and subdue the earth there" (Cotton 67). In order to achieve the dream of taking possession of the land, the Puritans needed to imagine their adopted new home as a blank space on which to project their longings and desires. In this view, the Puritan settlers often saw Native Americans mainly as nomadic hunters, ignoring the fact that they had cultivated and "improved" the land with a variety of crops.[12] Therefore, the rhetoric of a virgin soil and a pristine wilderness has served a clear colonial purpose of inviting more European immigrants to people and develop the land in vast North American continent.

In *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper describes the wilderness full of "people": good people (the British, the Mohicans) and bad people (the French, the Iroquois); the Europeans (the British, the French) and the "savage" Indians (the Mohicans, the Iroquois). Although the wilderness is an arena where bloody conflicts take place, it is never a "vacant" continent untouched by people. The forest is even marked by those buried there. As Cooper depicts in the first chapter,

---

[12] From this perspective, "[b]y continually referring to the American environment as a wild and untouched land, European accounts figuratively emptied the lands of its native inhabitants" (Perreault 23).

> While the husbandman shrank back from the dangerous passes, within the safer boundaries of the more ancient settlements, armies larger than those that had often disposed of the scepters of the mother countries, were seen to bury themselves in these forests, whence they rarely returned but in skeleton bands, that were haggard with care or dejected by defeat. Though the arts of peace were unknown to this fatal region, its forests were alive with men…. (16)

The forests, marked with human activities and burials, are "alive with men." More significantly, when Cooper writes in his 1831 "Introduction," the region has been depopulated with the disappearance of the Indian and becomes a "wilderness still" (10). As Cooper describes,

> The whole of that wilderness, in which the latter incidents of the legend occurred, is nearly a wilderness still, though the red man has entirely deserted this part of the state. Of all the tribes named in these pages, there exist only a few half-civilized beings of the Oneidas, on the reservations of their people in New York. The rest have disappeared, either from the regions in which their fathers dwelt, or altogether from the earth. (10)

In this passage, Cooper depicts the historical dispossession of the Indians by means of conquest and treaty as either their voluntary acceptance of deserting their homelands or their "natural" disappearance. As a result, the "virgin" condition of the wild forest is not a prior existence but rather a human-made consequence.[13]

---

[13] In his *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* (2006), when Charles C. Mann discusses the early nineteenth-century wilderness condition, he quotes historian Stephen Pyne by saying, "The virgin forest was not encountered in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was invented in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries." As Mann continues, "[f]ar from destroying pristine wilderness, that is, Europeans bloodily *created* it" (Mann 362).

Faced with the difficult situation of settling a colony, the Puritan settlers associated the wilderness with a land of spiritual darkness. “To many, the savage state of the wilderness signified Satanic power; they were convinced that America, the land of spiritual darkness, was the realm of the Antichrist” (Carroll 11). Since the Puritans saw themselves as God’s chosen people, they interpreted the wasteland as God’s will to test their faith. In this view, William Bradford’s “howling wilderness” is not a descriptive language only but a figurative metaphor for a setting of spiritual drama. The “howling wilderness” signifies “a geographic and spiritual absence of food, shelter, order, and God.” Moreover, it also represented “man’s sinful nature” (Schramm 405). For Bradford, wilderness is undoubtedly not an ecological idea but “a moral and theological one” that evokes the testing of Jesus in the wilderness where Satan tempts him. In his *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693), Cotton Mather writes, “The New-Englanders are a People of God settled in those, which were once the Devil’s Territories; and it may easily be supposed that the Devil was exceedingly disturbed, when he perceived such a People here accomplishing the Promise old made unto our Blessed Jesus. That He should have the Utmost part of the Earth for his Possession” (Mather 13). For Mather, the wilderness is associated with “Devil’s Territories” that the Puritans must pass through to reach the Promised Land. Therefore, the wild forest, for the Puritans, is not only a hostile environment to inhabit but also a symbol of their spiritual wilderness that all men and women must struggle constantly through their faith in God.

In Cooper’s novel, the wild woods and the Indians not only thwart Europeans’ efforts but dwarf their abilities to control everything. The wilderness is the antithesis of the world of white society in all respects. From the Europeans’ perspective, the space between Forts Edward and William Henry is marked with danger and foreignness while inside Fort

William Henry there is a white space in which domestic scenes take place. Outside the walls, nature is a hostile obstacle to overcome. Once the Europeans penetrate the uncharted wilderness, they begin to feel a strong sense of insecurity and lose control of the environment. They simply get lost, led astray, become an easy prey, "at the mercy of the wilderness and its natural, red inhabitants" (Ringe 1988a, 43). Before such immensity of space filled with unknown dangers, the white travelers carry with them profound fear and anxiety. Thus, a human figure is often seen as "a specter," "a dark form," and even "a demon" in the forests. The wilderness easily provokes the wild fantasy in travelers' mind that the Devil is lurking in the woods. As Cooper writes,

> While his lips were yet in the act of parting, a low but fearful sound arose from the forest, and was immediately succeeded by a high, shrill yell, that was drawn out, until it equaled the longest and most plaintive howl of the wolf. The sudden and terrible interruption caused Duncan to start from his seat, unconscious of everything but the effect produced by so frightful a cry. (268)

Out of his fear and anxiety in the deep woods, Duncan gets frightened easily by "a low but fearful sound" and a succeeding "high, shrill yell" of the wolf. Therefore, due to their incapability to handle their travel safely through the boundless forest, the European travelers become dependent upon the Indians: "These Indians know the nature of the woods, as it might be by instinct!" (41). In such wild nature, European knowledge and technology are of little use. Overconfident in his military prowess, Duncan Heyward constantly makes errors in his judgment in the forests. Hawkeye has warned him repeatedly: "Whoever comes into the woods to deal with the natives, must use Indian fashions, if he would wish to prosper in his undertakings" (48); "If you judge of Indian cunning by the rules you find in books, or by white sagacity, they will lead you astray, if not to your death" (233). For

the Indians, the wilderness is their homeland while, for the Europeans, the wilderness is a testing ground, a place full of "toils and dangers" (15) where their survival is far from guaranteed.

The Puritan settlers, though regarding the Indians as hopeless pagans, proclaimed that one of their motives to establish a colony was to convert the native inhabitants to Christianity. Many Puritan priests, like Cotton Mather, had participated in the mission of civilizing and Christianizing the savage. The Puritans believed that the Indians could "go from his state of uncultured animality to a state of civilization and culture under tutelage of an educator" (Michael Green 327). From this perspective, the Indians were seen as "children" whose souls needed spiritual education and redemption. Nevertheless, the plan to Christianize the native inhabitants had brought about only minor success, if not totally bitter failure. Furthermore, not until the Jamestown Massacre of 1622 did this image of the Indian begin to change. With the increasing conflicts between the European colonizers and the Indians over the land, a general tendency began to demonize the Indians. As Emory Elliott suggests, "the English would soon abandon their plan to convert the Indians to Christianity and then initiate a process of expulsion and annihilation of the Native peoples from their lands that would not end until every indigenous nation had been destroyed" (Elliott 9). Since then, the Indian gradually had become a symbol of threat to the Puritan religious utopia. The presence of the Indian was viewed as not only a real menace to the Puritan community, but also even a greater danger to the Puritan soul. The Puritans feared that having constant contact with the Indians would pose a spiritual threat: they might go "wild" and be attracted to sinful temptations. In their cosmic drama of good versus evil, the Puritans perceived the Indians as allies of satanic forces with their evil attempts to annihilate European colonial enterprises and all things Christian.

In *The Last of the Mohicans,* Cooper demonizes his Indian characters by evoking the image of the Indian as devil. Throughout the novel Cooper refers to the Indians as "imps," "demon," "red devil," "brute beasts," "dark specters," "treacherous inmates," "children of the devil," and "the devils who fill these woods." Without restraints of civilization, they are represented as barbarians engaged in a "savage warfare" with their "cunning," "savage yells," "horrors." Even the good Indian is no exception; as Cooper writes, "At the next instant the form of Chingachgook appeared from the bushes, looking like a specter in its paint, and glided across the path in swift pursuit" (51). With respect to the bad Indian, Magua is introduced as a savage with "an air of neglect about his person" (23) and a "sullen fierceness mingled with the quiet of savage" (22). As Cooper continues,

> The colors of the war-paint had blended in dark confusion about his fierce countenance, and rendered his swarthy lineaments still more savage and repulsive than if art had attempted an effect which had been thus produced by chance. His eye, alone, which glistened like a fiery star amid lowering clouds, was to be seen in its state of native wildness. For a single instant his searching and yet wary glance met the wondering look of the other, and then changing its direction, partly in cunning, and partly in disdain, it remained fixed, as if penetrating the distant air. (23)

In Cooper's characterization, Magua is almost not a human being but more like a beast, with "his fierce countenance" and a "state of wildness." As the story unfolds, we will learn that Magua is in fact a fallen chief corrupted by his contact with the vices of civilization. He is obsessive with revenge for being whipped by the British, revealing that he does not understand the concept of discipline. He commits the violent act in the cold-blooded massacre at the fall of Fort William Henry. Hence, for Cooper, Magua and all other

"devilish" Indians must be exterminated at the end of the novel.

The Puritan settlers identified the Native Americans as devils in human guise, who needed to be eliminated from the earth. In his "The Morality of Indian Hating," N. Scott Momaday indicates, the European immigrants "recognized at once their Old Testament foe in the New World wilderness; the Fiend was everywhere present in the painted faces" (Momaday 62). The Indians were often referred to not only as "pagans," "heathens," "savages," but also "Satan's agents." Since the Puritans perceived the devilish quality of wilderness, the residents of the wild forest were associated with Satan and witchcraft. These Biblical representations of the Indian as the other suggest the necessity of their final extermination from the earth to guarantee the prosperity of "a city upon the hill." Moreover, because the Puritans were so seriously concerned with the meaning of the Indian for their culture, their writings were replete with depictions of the Native American as "demonic manifestations of an internalized psychic struggle" (Bergland 1). Therefore, the best way for devout Christians to deal with the Indian problem was to eradicate them because "the devil" must be eliminated to make way for God's providence. For the Puritans, it was God's will that the Puritans and the Indians were actors in this cosmic drama while the former must in the end triumph over the latter, just as Lord's forces must defeat Satan's army.[14]

If *The Last of the Mohicans* is Cooper's bloodiest tale, then the massacre of women and children at Fort William Henry is the climax of the "savage warfare." The massacre represents the inevitable consequence of a civilization meeting savagism along its frontiers. From the beginning of the novel, Cooper has emphasized how the wilderness shapes the

[14] The central theme of this drama, as Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. points out, "was the eternal conflict between God and Satan, and the plot revolved about the salvation of some men who were to be born again to eternal bliss and the many who were unregenerate and therefore damned to hell" (81).

course and the conduct of battle in the forest frontier: the "colonial wars of North America" were fought in "the wilderness" with the techniques of "the practised native warriors" (15); the story offered a "picture of the cruelty and fierceness of the savage warfare of those periods" (15). In this kind of warfare, the Indians practice the savage violence against their European foes: "The terrific character of their merciless enemies, increased, immeasurably, the natural horrors of warfare. Numberless recent massacres were still vivid in their recollections…the natives of the forest were the principal and barbarous actors" (17-18). As Richard Slotkin states, "Quite early in the history of white-Indian relations, a conception of Indian warfare developed that tended to represent the struggle as necessarily genocidal. 'Savage war' was distinguished from 'civilized warfare' in its lack of limitations of the extent of violence, and of 'laws' for its application" (Slotkin 1994, 53). Without restraints of civilization and its "laws," the savage warfare is represented as extremely violent, cruel, and bloody. As Cooper describes the massacre at Fort William Henry,

> More than two thousand raving savages broke from the forest at the signal, and threw themselves across the fatal plain with instinctive alacrity. We shall not dwell on the revolting horrors that succeeded. Death was everywhere, and in his most terrific and disgusting aspects. Resistance only served to inflame the murderers, who inflicted their furious blows long after their victims were beyond the power of their resentment. The flow of blood might be likened to the outbreaking of a torrent; and as the natives became heated and maddened by the sight, many among them even kneeled to the earth, and drank freely, exultingly, hellishly, of the crimson tide. (199)

In this horrible scene, Cooper evokes the natural imagery of water to describe the cruelty of a bloody slaughter in the North American frontier. People are killed like animals without

any mercy or civilized virtues. Through his novel, Cooper shows his contemporary readers a past history of the incredible barbarity of an inferior, savage people. The doctrine of savage warfare, according to Richard Slotkin, presupposes that "certain races are inherently disposed to cruel and atrocious violence" (1994, 53). Therefore, by associating the massacre with red savagery in the novel, Cooper provides a rationale for removing Indians in the 1820s.

The Puritans, especially women, used the genre of captivity narrative and their ordeal in the wilderness as a testing ground for their faith in God. For example, Mary White Rowlandson published her "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Together, with the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed; Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson…" in 1682. In her narrative, Rowlandson describes the Indians as diabolical monsters, so as to impress upon the readers about the horrors of her ordeal. The purpose is to dehumanize the Native Americans. However, such "dehumanizing" of the Indians serves the Puritans as a religious experience with profound spiritual meanings because for the Puritans, to become devil's captives is a religious trial to test their faith in God. Moreover, since the captive is in a physically and psychologically perilous position, the escape from the Indians to the freedom signifies not only as "a sign of divine favor" but also as "their future redemption in heaven" (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 19).

In her captivity narrative, Rowlandson employs the language of racist stereotype in demonizing the Indians. She describes the Indians in dualistic terms: "there was a vast difference between the lovely faces of Christians and the foul looks of those heathens which much damped my spirit again" (59). The Indians are depicted as bloodthirsty and even inhuman at the outset. As Rowlandson writes,

> Another there was who running along was shot and wounded and fell down;

> he begged of them his life, promising them money (as they told me), but they would not hearken to him but knocked him in [the] head, stripped him naked, and split open his bowels…Thus these murderous wretches went on, burning and destroying before them. (Rowlandson 33)

In this passage, Rowlandson represents the Indians as "murderous" animals that attack their preys without mercy. For Rowlandson, the Indians are not only "hell-hounds" but also "merciless Heathen," "ravenous Beasts," "Barbarous Creatures," "the bloody heathen," "ravenous beasts," "barbarous heathens," and "pagans" who are "as black as the devil" and "triumphed and rejoiced in their inhuman, and many times devilish cruelty to the English." Near the end of her narrative, Rowlandson feels relieved with her release to freedom, but she also wonders about the meaning of the Indian: "I cannot but take notice of the strange providence of God in preserving the heathen" (44). Therefore, in spite of the religious purpose of the captivity narrative for the Puritans, the captivity narrative still serves a means for spreading the anti-Indian propaganda against those that hinder the progress of Anglo-American colonization and expansion.

Cooper also employs the plot of popular captivity narrative in *The Last of the Mohicans* in order to demonstrate women's situation in a hostile wilderness. From the beginning, Munro's two daughters, Alice and Cora, are on their difficult journey through a dangerous forest to their father at Fort William Henry. Like Puritan captives suffering in the wilderness, Cooper's travelers also see themselves figuratively in hell. As Cooper describes, "[m]ile after mile was, however, passed through the boundless woods, in this painful manner, without any prospect of a termination to their journey" (111). From a man's gaze, women's bodily forms are "fragile" in such a dangerous place: "While, therefore, he sustained an outward appearance of calmness and fortitude, his heart leaped into his throat,

whenever any of their fierce captors drew nearer than common to the helpless sisters, or fastened one of their sullen, wandering looks on those fragile forms which were so little able to resist the slightest assault" (106). After the fall of Fort William Henry and the massacre, Alice and Cora are held captives by Magua and led to the Huron village. Their safety and femininity are threatened.[15]

In the novel, Cooper creates two different characters of Alice and Cora as two very different types of captivity heroine, and he presents their divergent reactions to captivity. Alice Munro, with her "the most juvenile in her appearance," "fair golden hair, and bright blue eyes" (23), is "lighthearted, weak, and innocent" and "the ideal sentimental heroine of a captivity narrative, weeping and fainting as she confronts a series of purely physical dangers" (Haberly 437). On the contrary, Cora, with "her dark eye," "shining and black" tresses, and "rather fuller and more mature" body (24), is the heroine prey to what David T. Haberly suggests the three moral perils of defeminization, rape, and Indianization. First, Cora turns "masculine" for being brave in confronting danger during their travel in the wilderness, as Cooper describes what Cora says, "'I sicken at the sight of danger that I cannot share,' and 'We are equal, on such an errand we will follow to any danger'" (161). Besides, Magua proposes to marry Cora while Cora is attracted to Uncas, with the former symbolizing the risk of rape and the latter, Indianization. Before the "horrid alternative" of a forced marriage and sexual submission to Magua, Cora "retained, notwithstanding her powerful disgust, sufficient self-command to reply, without betraying the weakness" (119). With "the thought [of marrying Magua] itself is worse than a thousand deaths" (125),

---

[15] In addition to the common perils of torture and death, as David T. Haberly points out, "three important additional dangers might await female captives": "defeminization," "rape," and "Indianization" (Haberly 435-6).

Cora's fate is sealed because she would die to preserve her dignity. David T. Haberly suggests Cora's death completes her Indianization because she is buried beside Uncas with an Indian burial. However, since Cooper kills off Uncas and Cora and thus the possibility of their marriage for the American future, I suggest the Indianization is only symbolic due to Cooper's strong belief in anti-miscegenation.

The Puritan settlers' religious experience of purifying their spiritual wilderness in the New World turns ultimately into a settler colonial project of subduing the wild nature and conquering "the savage" in the name of progress and civilization. "Civilizing the New World," as Roderick Nash states, "meant enlightening darkness, ordering chaos, and changing evil into good" (Nash 2001, 24). For the Puritans, after their attempts to convert the Indians to Christianity failed and their mutual relationship deteriorated, they began to associate the Indian with the devil and held malicious attitude toward them. Ultimately, a fixed stereotype of the Indian had been established, which would determine the future course of the Indian policy in the nineteenth-century America.[16] In literature, following the Puritan ideology of good-versus-evil duality and under the influence of European Romanticism, the American writers had invented a "perfect drama" for the Indians to act: for the noble savages, like Uncas and Chingachgook, they fight along with the white, and they finally die nobly giving way to the triumph of Euro-American civilization. The romantic glorification of the noble savage in this context can be read as an attempt to alleviate the white guilt over the misdeeds done to the Native Americans. But their ultimate fate toward extinction is sealed. Another part of "this drama" is: for the bloodthirsty ignoble

[16] Such racist and prejudiced stereotype, as Derounian-Stodola and Levernier state, "typically begins as misunderstanding, quickly evolves into deliberate distortion of truth, and eventually degenerates into slanderous fiction masquerading as fact" (63).

savages, like Magua, they must be eradicated as devils as if God had willed so. As Paul A. Newlin states, "a Devil figure that could be exterminated without compunction – and the forest itself could be destroyed whenever it harbored the Devil Indians or otherwise impeded white man's push for material possession, better known as God's will" (Newlin 29). Therefore, as the Puritans' religious fervor and economic motives for the expropriation of land were combined to inspire colonization in the New World, most white settlers, in the name of God's will, had justified their violent aggressions against indigenous peoples of America.[17]

The Anglo-Americans had developed the ideological principle of "Manifest Destiny" on the basis of Puritan's sacred mission of "errand into the wilderness." As Richard C. Poulsen claims, "Puritan attitudes toward Native Americans were adopted by whites pursuing the thrust of Manifest Destiny" (Poulsen 47). The westward movement thus became a divine enterprise of progress ordained by God into the western territories, the "Indian Country." In this view, the pioneers advanced into the West to transform the wilderness into garden, as the Puritan settlers sailed to America to build "a city upon the hill." In this context of imperial expansionism, the Native American was identified as the vicious other that needed to be removed or destroyed.[18] From a psychological perspective, in order to eliminate the guilt and fear in their psyche, the American settlers demonized the

---

[17] It is not surprising to note that John Winthrop, an important Puritan minister, "interpreted the smallpox plague as God's generous land clearing to prepare it for His saints" (Emory Elliott 38).

[18] The Indians, as Martin Barker and Roger Sabin state, "became an obstacle to the Dream – in the way of expansion, of progress, of white Americans fulfilling their true potential. They would have to go, either by being destroyed or through assimilation. Moreover, the Dream implied that this was God's will: it was predestined that the native would vanish before the onset of civilization, ordained as the natural progression of evolution" (12).

Indians. As Richard Slotkin indicates,

> The accusation is better understood as an act of psychological projection that made the Indians scapegoats for morally troubling side of American expansion: the myth of "savage war" became a basic ideological convention of a culture that was itself increasingly devoted to the extermination or expropriation of the Indians and the kidnapping and enslavement of black Africans. (Slotkin 1992, 12-13)

Such a strategy is successful not only in justifying the economic hunger for land but also in legitimatizing the dispossession of the Indians. In settlers' view, because the Indians do not cultivate the land, they have no "rights" to the land. The policy of Indian Removal thus serves as a means to satisfy the land hunger of white frontiersmen.[19] In order to acquire more lands, the Anglo-American settlers invaded and appropriated the indigenous homelands. From this perspective, the cultural construction of wilderness as a "virgin land" served as an ideological means to justify their occupation. The settlers not only ignored the human presence on the land or simply portrayed the Indians as nomadic hunters, but also erased indigenous uses of the land and their marks on the landscape. After all, for the settlers, "unimproved" land meant free land.

In this section, I have read *The Last of the Mohicans* by juxtaposing it with the Puritan wilderness discourse. I argue that Cooper and the Puritans have similar representations of the American Indian and the wilderness in order to justify the

---

[19] As Emory Elliott states, "The English were mainly farmers, fishermen, and manufacturers. They viewed land as something to be possessed, enclosed, cultivated, and protected, and they sought to establish towns and cities that required square miles of cleared land. Such a process of clearing and expansion meant that the English were constantly moving west, infringing upon tribal lands, and claiming new lands as their own" (Elliott 8).

subjugation and removal of the former and the conquest and domestication of the latter. For Cooper and the Puritans, the wilderness signifies not merely a place of wild nature and animals, but a blank space onto which they can project their dreams or nightmares. For the Puritans, the wilderness represents a spiritual wasteland that they must purify for redemption; the physical wilderness serves as a testing ground for their faith in God. They project the abject "evil" onto the Indian others who dwell and lurk in the forest, justifying their dispossession and the conquest of the "wild nature" inward and outward. In Cooper's novel, the wild forest is a place filled with danger and death that the devilish Indians are ready to inflict on the innocent women and the European military campaign. The "savage warfare" and the Indians' bloodthirsty cruelty in the remote frontier justify their displacement by Anglo-American settlers with their superior values. The wilderness is to be emptied out of its indigenous inhabitants and becomes an unpopulated "wilderness," a new "virgin land" for the American settlers to build a settlement in the frontier in *The Pioneers*.

II. The Pioneers (1823)

The Pioneers (1823) begins in 1793, a few years after the creation of the new republic, and is set in the Otsego Lake region of upstate New York. Based on his father's Cooperstown, Cooper creates a fictionalized version and calls it "Templeton." Judge Marmaduke Temple, like William Cooper, is the founder of a frontier community. Calling upon his personal memories, Cooper is writing a tale to examine themes like the displacement of Indians, the ownership of the land, the conflict between the individual and the community, the establishment of law, and the general conditions of a frontier society. By exploring a period of history in the past, Cooper provides his readers with his comments

on the present society and even on the future of America. Templeton, in the opening of *The Pioneers*, is a thriving frontier settlement. In spite of its natural bounty and various accomplishments, Templeton is not a town without flaws. First, it is founded in a land dispossessed of its original inhabitants. The Indian population has been reduced to one, an aged, drunken Chingachgook who is now converted to Christianity and called John Mohegan. With his death and the marriage of Oliver Effingham and Elizabeth Temple at the end of the novel, Cooper has alleviated the white guilt by displacing a history of dispossession and removal to a case of family property inheritance.[20] Second, *The Pioneers* presents a post-Indian-removal society in which Anglo-American settlers "improve" the land and even exploit the natural resources in a wasteful way. Therefore, in this section, I discuss Cooper's construction of an uninhabited wilderness and his representation of settlers' abusive attitudes toward nature. Instead of following the traditional interpretative frame that regards the conflict between Leatherstocking's view of nature and Judge Temple's as natural law versus civil law, I read their different views as competing environmental ethics.[21]

---

[20] Critics have pointed out Cooper's anxieties about the legitimization of the acquisition of land in the novel as well as in his family. In *The Pioneers*, Oliver Effingham played Indian to question Judge Temple about the rightful ownership of the land because his father Edward Effingham's property was confiscated due to the defeat in the Revolutionary War and then purchased by Temple. Oliver's grandfather Major Effingham was granted the land because, in Cooper's plotting, he had saved Chingachgook's life and thus was adopted into the Delaware as "the son of Mohegan". Therefore, in the chain of land transfer, Oliver had replaced Chingachgook as the wronged party who was dispossessed of his "property." Cooper's concern with the rightful ownership of the land in the novel became a "property case" of white men rather than the Indian's right to the land.

[21] Cooper's *The Pioneers* is an important environmental text in the history of American environmentalism. As Craig White argues, *The Pioneers* "remains, like all other Leather-Stocking Tales, an important text for

In *The Pioneers*, Cooper constructs the landscape as an uninhabited wilderness before the settlement of Templeton. Although he recognizes that there have been Indian activities around the region, they happen long time ago. Even the dispossession takes place long ago. As Cooper describes, "Before the Europeans, or, to use a more significant term, the Christians, dispossessed the original owners of the soil, all that section of country, which contains the New-England States, and those of the Middle which lie east of the mountains, was occupied by two great nations of Indians, from whom had descended numberless tribes" (83). The Revolutionary War has driven off the European powers while the Indians are disappearing: "As the natives gradually disappeared from the country of the Mohegans, some scattering families sought a refuge around the council-fire of the mother tribe, or the Delawares" (84). In Cooper's descriptions, dispossessing the Indians of their ancestral homelands is Europeans' doing that happens long ago and the new United States that inherits the land from European powers has remained innocent. As Jean M. O'Brien observes in her study of New England local history, "The lengthy, complex, and contested history of Indian relations is dispensed with in a series of sweeping assertions that dismiss Indians as long gone, replaced by non-Indians who are making modernity" (O'Brien 55). Therefore, Cooper's account represents the disappearance of the indigenous people as not only inevitable but natural.

In fact, the Indians' title to the land had been extinguished during the colonial period, once at the close of the French and Indian War in 1763, and then again at the end of the

---

ecological criticism" (White 130). Robert Daly calls Cooper's "environmentalism is one of his great virtues, and Cooper is well ahead of his contemporaries in arguing against the 'wasty ways' that Natty deplores" (Daly xviii). To Daniel G. Payne, Cooper is "the first American novelist to address the ongoing destruction of America's forests and wild life" (Payne 21).

Revolutionary War. As Sarah Klotz states, "Vast tracts of land became available for purchase after the Revolution when Iroquois tribes allied with the British were gradually forced from their ancestral lands by settlers and the governments of New York and the United States" (Klotz 334). By the time the novel opens, the tribes had long been dispersed.[22] In his 1832 "Introduction" to *The Pioneers*, Cooper mentions that, in 1779, "an expedition was sent against the hostile Indians who dwelt, about a hundred miles west of Otsego, on the banks of the Cayuga." During the stay of the troops, "a soldier was shot for desertion" and his grave became "the first place of human interment that the author ever beheld" (7-8). From this perspective, the Indians, with their "animal existence" (83), have left no marks on the land. Cooper's myth has obscured a history of brutal conquest and violent dispossession.

The episode of Judge Temple's "Mount Vision" further strengthens the view of the landscape as a "virgin land" untouched by humans. For settlers, "the land had to be empty. Empty land can be settled" (Johnston and Lawson 364). The land is imagined as a blank space onto which Temple projects his desire and dream to people the land. As Cooper describes,

> I left my party, the morning of my arrival, near the farms of the Cherry Valley, and, following a deer-path, rode to the summit of the mountain that I have since called Mount Vision; for the sight that there met my eyes seemed to me as the deceptions of a dream. The fire had run over the pinnacle, and in a great measure laid open the view. The leaves were fallen, and I mounted a tree and sat for an hour looking on the silent wilderness. Not an opening was to be seen

[22] As Robert Daly states, "[b]y Cooper's time Native American land claims had been vacated or ignored" (Daly xii).

> in the boundless forest except where the lake lay, like a mirror of glass. …but not the vestige of a man could I trace during my progress, nor from my elevated observatory. No clearing, no hut, none of the winding roads that are now to be seen, were there; nothing but mountains rising behind mountains…. (235)

With its religious overtones, Cooper describes the land that Temple sees as "the silent wilderness," an extra-historical space untouched by the humanity. The empty land signifies to Temple endless possibilities for the future. Temple is like an American Adam encountering a new, pristine Eden. Like those European discoverers who built a new colony/nation on an "vacant continent," Judge Temple views "Mount Vision" as the innocent origin of Templeton.[23] However, the unpeopled and unimproved land must be created first to invite the settlers to people it.[24] Later, following the summit episode,

---

[23] As Donald E. Pease contends, "The metaphor of Virgin Land condensed a broad range of historically distinct actions – the uprooting, immigration, resettlement of European exiles on a newly 'discovered' territorial landmass – and the frame narrative of American exceptionalism regulated the meanings that should and that should not be assigned to these actions. At its core, the metaphor of Virgin Land was designed to fulfill Europe's wish to start life afresh by relinquishing history on behalf of the secular dream of the construction of a new Eden. The metaphor gratified European emigrants' need to believe that America was an unpopulated space" (Pease 159).

[24] Critics have challenged the idea that the Indians left no mark on the land or made "no improvements." In his *The Last of the Mohicans: Civil Savagery and Savage Civility* (1995), John McWilliams points out that "[n]either the Iroquois, the Delaware, nor the Hurons were nomadic hunter-warriors who lived for the chase and for battle." According to McWilliams, "As early as 1650, all five Iroquois tribes were fundamentally agricultural"; they raised "maize, beans, squash, and sunflowers" and cultivated "orchards" (McWilliams 85). In his *William Cooper's Town* (1995), Alan Taylor argues that the natives had shaped nature like any human population: "They obtained most of their diet not from hunting and gathering but from an agriculture that was more productive per acre than that of the white settlers. Most of the Indians' domain remained a forest, but they cleared and cultivated impressive fields along the river bottoms. Their well-

Temple sees "smoke curling from under the mountain" and finds "a rough cabin of logs, built against the foot of a rock, and bearing the marks of a tenant" (236); he first regards it to be "a habitation of the Indians" (236) but finally discovers it is Leatherstocking. In my view, Cooper has displaced the Indians with a white man as the original inhabitant of an unpopulated wilderness, further justifying the Anglo-American claims to the land as rightful. By claiming they are the first people who establish cultures and institutions on the empty land, the settlers justify their invasion and occupation. From this perspective, as we can see in *The Pioneers*, the issue of land ownership has become a legal case of property among the white men and has nothing to do with the Indians.

In *The Pioneers*, the only and last presence of the Indian in a post-removal settler society is Chingachgook and he must vanish in order to complete the project of nation-building. *The Pioneers*, as Eric Cheyfitz states, is "a narrative in which Indians appear to disappear" (121). In the novel, Chingachgook is the last survivor of all Indian tribes that once populated the land. His existence serves "to prod the consciences of the whites" (Ringe 1988b, xix); therefore, his death will expiate the white guilt and resolve any conflict

---

tended and Nourishing crops of maize, beans, squashes, and pumpkins were the envy of encroaching settlers" (Taylor 35). Taylor calls the settlers' erasure of Natives' mark on the land as "the myth of the second creation" in which the immigrants indigenized themselves by claiming their identity with the land and at the time "accelerated this obliteration of the Indian presence" (Taylor 38). On the one hand, settlers often chose the best land formerly inhabited by the Indians: "the first white settlers and speculators scanned the landscape for signs of Indian occupation as evidence of the very best lands" (Taylor 38). By denying all marks of Indian ownership and use, settlers justified the conquest and expropriation. On the other, settlers invented a vacuum onto which they "superimposed a future landscape: a habit of projection which ensured that the land would be changed" (Taylor 38). By telling a new story of their painful and renewed transformation of the wilderness into cultivated lands, the victorious American settlers had displaced the Indians as the original inhabitants of the land and "erased from memory the accomplishments of the Indians" (Taylor 39).

with Natives' right to the land. Although Chingachgook now becomes a Christian and called "John Mohegan" or "Indian John," he is "melancholy" and leads a "ghostly" life: as Elizabeth Temple describes in a conversation with Louisa, "I own that I grieve when I see old Mohegan walking about these lands, like the ghost of one of their ancient possessors" (280). Renée L. Bergland claims that the American literary discourse in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries often portrays Native Americans as ghostly beings: "When European Americans speak of Native Americans, they always use the language of ghostliness. They call Indians demons, apparitions, shapes, specters, or ghosts. They insist that Indians are able to appear and disappear suddenly and mysteriously, and also they are ultimately doomed to vanish" (1). The notion of Indian ghostliness discloses a sense of anxiety for white Americans with respect to the controversial issue of Indian Removal. Even Chingachgook, like other Indian prophets in Cooper's novels, predicts his inevitable death and the larger fate of the Indians as a whole: "There will soon be no red-skin in the country. When John has gone, the last will leave these hills, and his family will be dead" (403). The fate of the Indians is doomed. As Elizabeth Temple says: "but what can I do—what can my father do? Should we offer the old man a home' and a maintenance, his habits would compel him to refuse us. Neither were we so silly as to wish such a thing, could we convert these clearings and farms again into hunting grounds, as the Leather-Stocking would wish to see them" (280). The romantic mourning over the passing of a race as an "inevitable" tragedy has become an important means of assuaging the white guilt in the U.S. context. Therefore, with the death of the last Indian and the self-imposed exile of Leatherstocking at the end of the novel, the Indian question has been completely removed and resolved.

With the settlement secure from the Indian attack, Templeton becomes a thriving town in the frontier. By clearing the forest and cultivating the land, the settlers begin to

give the order to the disorder of the wilderness and strongly believe in their right to "improve" the land. As Cooper depicts,

> the whole district is hourly exhibiting how much can be done, in even a rugged country, and with a severe climate, under the dominion of mild laws, and where every man feels a direct interest in the prosperity of a commonwealth, of which he knows himself to form a part. The expedients of the pioneers who first broke ground in the settlement of this country, are succeeded by the permanent improvements of the yeoman. (15-16)

In this passage, Cooper emphasize the way how the pioneers and the yeoman work on the land of "a rugged country" with freedom, "under the dominion of mild laws." Throughout the novel, Cooper stresses the speed that the settlers have altered the land: "How rapidly is civilization treading on the footsteps of nature!" (212). Nevertheless, the settlers have changed the landscape recklessly and caused environmental damage without considering the consequences.[25] Only with the disappearance of wild nature do the settlers begin to express nostalgia for it and realize the importance of preserving it. In *The Pioneers*, the settlement of Templeton, with its abundant natural resources, can be seen as a small island in a vast wilderness, there is still no need to preserve wild nature in a preserve. Only after most of the continent has been settled and the forests have been cleared does the

[25] In his *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650-1900* (2003), John C. Weaver states, "Late in life a few early settlers could reminisce and even reflect about the ecological damage their efforts to improve had brought. Some old pioneers were nostalgic about the worlds that they had encountered and had worked to seize and change in a short time. They and their children were the last to know lakes, forests, marshes, and grasslands before all was 'improved'" (90).

preservation become important and necessary.[26]

Cooper expresses his anxiety over the settlers' squandering of nature's resources. In the novel, Richard Jones and Billy Kirby are representatives of this kind of settlers who view nature simply as a repository of natural resources for human use and exploit them carelessly for their pleasure. They believe natural resources are superabundant and inexhaustible and man's job is to dominate and subdue nature. They represent a viewpoint of anthropocentrism in the spectrum of environmental ethics. Anthropocentrism, by definition, is that "humans are the measure of all value" (Nash 1989, 10). Nature and its resources exist only for the interests of humans and humans can feel free to use it, and even exploit it. For example, Billy Kirby chops and burns trees by the acre to open new land for settlement. To him, trees are useless unless "improved" by his own will: "they are a sore sight at any time, unless I'm privileged to work my will on them" (229). In drawing the maple sap to make sugar, Kirby has inflicted "dreadful wounds" on the trees without caring about the consequences. Richard Jones, the sheriff of Templeton and Judge Temple's cousin, uses the sugar maple wood for fireplace fuel in the house despite Temple's ban of it, and he scoffs at the idea that the seemingly boundless forest could ever be exhausted. To Kirby, there is no cause for alarm about the future in cutting down trees because he sees nature as a warehouse of inexhaustible resources: "if there's plenty of anything in this mountaynious country, it's the trees. If there's any sin in chopping them, I've a pretty heavy account to settle; for I've chopped over the best half of a thousand acres, with my own

[26] As Roderick Nash notes, "Constant exposure to wilderness gave rise to fear and hatred on the part of those who had to fight it for survival and success. Although there were a few exceptions, American frontiersmen rarely judged wilderness with criteria other than the utilitarian or spoke of their relation to it in other than a military metaphor. It was their children and grandchildren, removed from a wilderness condition, who began to sense its ethical and religious values" (2001, 42-43).

hands, counting both Varmount and York States; and I hope to live to finish the whull, before I lay up my axe" (229). Richard Jones repeatedly echoes this view, "there are trees enough here for all of us, and some to spare" (109). Kirby and Jones, whose "strong anthropocentrism emphasizes their ecological blindness" (Mnassar, 82), show little concern with the resources they have exploited since both of them practice resourceful wastefulness.

Chapter Twenty-Two and Chapter Twenty-Three are the climax of environmental destruction in *The Pioneers*. Chapter Twenty-Two is also called "The Slaughter of the Pigeons." In response to the magnificent spectacle of the unusually large number of pigeons, the whole town of Templeton becomes suddenly alive with people, including men, women, and children, all of whom leave their houses not to join a peaceful observation but a battle regiment. All the villagers are enlisted in the pigeon shoot, waging war against the flocks of birds and killing them by the thousands. Here Cooper uses war imagery in his description of the slaughter of these harmless birds. All kinds of firearms, including guns, pistols, muskets, bows, arrows and even the cannon, are used to fight against the birds as if they were fighting a hostile, dangerous enemy. As Cooper describes,

> So prodigious was the number of the birds, that the scattering fire of the guns, with the hurling of missiles, and the cries of the boys, had no other effect than to break off small flocks from the immense masses that continued to dart along the valley, as if the whole of the feathered tribe were pouring through that on pass. None pretended to collect the game, which lay scattered over the fields in such profusion, as to cover the very ground with the fluttering victims. (246)

By comparing passenger pigeons to "the feathered tribe," Cooper's figurative language suggests that the settlers of Templeton fight against the birds as if they were engaged in a

battle against the Indians. The slaughter finally ends with Richard Jones' announcement of "victory": "victory! We have driven the enemy from the field" with the ground covered with bodies of victims whose innocent eyes caused Judge Temple to halt "the sport" (250). In Chapter Twenty-Three, the settlers practice resource wastefulness again. When fishing at night on Otsego Lake, they drag hundreds of fish out of the lake in seine nets, far more than they need, and leave the fish on the shore to rot. "I call that fishing," exalts Richard Jones. After the first haul, Billy Kirby exclaims, "here's all kinds, and the Lord condemn me for a liar if there ain't a thousand bass!" (259). Witnessing the wanton destruction of natural resources, Judge Temple begins to worry about the consequence: "This is a fearful expenditure of the choicest gifts of Providence," and added, "like all the other treasures of the wilderness, they already begin to disappear, before the wasteful extravagance of man" (259-260). Temple's reaction shows an environmental awareness that will contribute to his idea of utilitarian management of natural resources.

While his enterprise is "taming the very forests" (212), Judge Temple represents an environmental ethic of conserving natural resources with an eye to the future. Based on economic and still anthropocentric considerations rather than aesthetic or spiritual ones, Judge Temple, as a leader of a growing frontier community, has realized the importance of how to use natural resources more wisely and conserving them for the long-term use.[27] He

[27] In my view, Judge Temple's position is very similar to Gifford Pinchot's. Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946), in contrast to John Muir's preservationist viewpoint, advocated the conservation of the nation's natural resources by planned use and renewal. According to Roderick Nash, "When Gifford Pinchot named it in 1907, conservation stood squarely in the American mainstream. The Progressive conservationists made every effort to plant their seedling notion in the fertile soil of national growth and strength. Utilitarianism and anthropocentrism marked the early movement. Time and again Pinchot, the first Chief of the U. S. Forest Service, pointed out that conservation did not mean protecting or preserving nature. On the contrary, it stood for wise and efficient use of natural resources. The idea was to control nature and serve the material

does not see nature in aesthetic or spiritual terms; rather, he wants to protect nature for its worth in economic terms: ; “The first object of my solicitude…is to protect the sources of this great mine of comfort and wealth from the extravagance of the people themselves” (221); “It is not as ornaments that I value the noble trees of this country; it is for their usefulness” (229). Judge Temple understands clearly the wise management of natural resources is the foundation of maintaining a good, wealthy, and comfortable life. In *The Pioneers,* on the one hand, Judge Temple is often shocked by settlers’ prodigal waste of natural resources and laments over the rapid disappearance of nature: “It grieves me to witness the extravagance that pervades this country, where the settlers trifle with the blessings they might enjoy, with the prodigality of successful adventurers” (228). On the other, he is contemplating how to check settlers’ thoughtless waste and balance resources with human use. As Judge Temple says to Richard Jones, “it behooves the owner of woods so extensive as mine, to be cautious what example he sets his people, who are already felling the forests as if no end could be found to their treasures, nor any limits to their extent. If we go on in this way, twenty years hence we shall want fuel” (105). For Temple, the reckless and wanton destruction of nature will ultimately lead to shortage and even exhaustion. Therefore, Judge Temple will appeal to the civil law as a means to control settlers’ wasteful manners.

As an idealized character, Leatherstocking maintains a moral view of nature and show reverence for the wilderness. From his long life in the forest, Leatherstocking has learned his relationship with nature and developed a strong sense of self-restraint to discipline himself in the moral code. Taking only what he needs from nature,

---

interests of humankind but with an eye to long-term needs” (Nash 1989, 8-9).

Leatherstocking regards the natural bounty as provided by a beneficent God for man's use: "It's much better to kill only such as you want, without wasting your powder and lead, than to be firing into God's creatures in this wicked manner"; "Use, but don't waste. Wasn't the woods made for the beasts and birds to harbor in? and when man wanted their flesh, their skins, or their feathers, there's the place to seek them" (248). In his view, man can use nature for his needs but can never destroy nature at will. While Judge Temple sometimes joins the villagers with their wasteful behavior simply for pleasure, Leatherstocking is the only one who deplores such heedless destruction of nature by a civilized society. For Leatherstocking, nature is not a repository of natural resources but a place where he can experience religious awe and spiritual satisfaction. As Sabri Mnassar suggests, "the view that nature has intrinsic value is exemplified through the character of Leatherstocking. Throughout the novel, in fact, Leatherstocking's moral and spiritual valuation of nature is evident" (Mnassar 82). Indeed, Leatherstocking's favorite spot in the wilderness is not just a place to appreciate the beauty of nature; "it is a spot to make a man solemnize" (294) about God's creation. From this perspective, Leatherstocking represents an environmental ethic that sees the spiritual value of nature and holds a non-exploitative attitude toward the natural world.[28]

In Cooper's mind, no matter how he sympathizes with Leatherstocking and his moral view of nature, his major concern is how to establish a civil society based on the rule of law. "Cooper's own political thought," as John McWilliams points out, "is torn between

---

[28] As Richard Slotkin states, "Temple's law converts the hunting land to tillage and the savage hunter to the Christian farmer and merchant, who wring profit from the soil through speculation as much as husbandry. Hawkeye's law ordains, not the conversion of the land, but the adjustment of man to the land; not the breaking of the forest to man's will, but the submission of human will to the laws inherent in nature" (Slotkin 2000, 488-489).

the individual's right to freedom and the community's need for order" (1972, 101). However, Cooper understands clearly that most of the settlers lack self-restraints that Leatherstocking has to control their desires. Because their selfishness has blinded them to take a more rational attitude toward nature, they must be restrained by law. In spite of Leatherstocking 's disdain for "the twisty ways of the law" (291), Temple is skeptical of the effectiveness of self-restraint on a social level. Throughout the novel, he has mentioned many times about the importance of the law and his role as the executioner of the law: "It is my duty to preserve the peace of the county, and see the laws executed" (184); "Society cannot exist without wholesome restraints. Those restraints cannot be inflicted, without security and respect to the persons of those who administer them" (382). In the novel, when Leatherstocking kills a deer out of season, Cooper highlights the conflict between individual freedom and social order to a climax. First, Cooper's irony is apparent because Leatherstocking, the most self-disciplined of all the people in Templeton, is the one who breaks the game law and should be punished. Second, Leatherstocking resists arrest by Hiram Doolittle, who tries to use the law to satisfy his curiosity about what is in Leatherstocking's cabin. The law has been misused as an illegitimate means for personal purpose. Third, Leatherstocking just recently saves Elizabeth, the daughter of Judge Temple, an event that will test Judge Temple's determination to enforce the law impartially. However, Temple insists that the law be rigidly enforced, as he relates to his daughter Elizabeth, "The laws alone remove us from the condition of the savages; that he has been criminal, and that his judge was thy father." (383). In Cooper's view, even though the law is no guarantee that justice will prevail, the rule of law is absolutely necessary for the stability of a civil society in the frontier.

The Pioneers is an American origin story because its frontier town Templeton is

built in a "pristine" wilderness where its original inhabitants have been dispossessed long ago. The first inhabitant who Judge Temple finds in such empty wilderness is not any Native American but Leatherstocking, a white man, which legitimatizes Anglo-Americans' claims to the ownership of the land. In the novel, the issue of ownership, from the start to the end, is a legal and family business among white men while Chingachgook, the only surviving Indian in the novel, suffers to face his inevitable extinction. With Chingachgook's death and the union of two white families, the project of nation-building is completed because the transfer of land to the white is secured. The settlers become indigenized by owning, improving, and identifying with the land: "The indigenized settler is the figure who is ready to step in when the native 'dies out.'" (Johnston and Lawson 364). Moreover, in such a post-dispossession society, settlers are engaged in "improving" the land and even exploit natural resources in a wasteful manner. Among their different competing environmental ethics, Cooper is most concerned how to establish the rule of law as the foundation of a civic society in the frontier. However, Cooper's dealing with the grave environmental consequences of making a settlement in the frontier does make *The Pioneers* an important pioneering work in environmental studies.

III. The Prairie (1827)

The Prairie is set in 1804 right after the Louisiana Purchase, and during the time of Lewis and Clark Expedition. *The Prairie* is the third of Cooper's five Leatherstocking Tales and the last in the chronology of Leatherstocking's life. No more a hunter in *The Pioneers* (1823), nor a soldier in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Leatherstocking, called the trapper, is now an old man and will die at the conclusion of the novel. Following the previous two novels, *The Prairie* deals with the theme of nature versus civilization in an era of westward

expansion. The American settlers, in the name of progress, undertake an imperial mission of "Manifest Destiny" to conquer the wilderness and to dispossess the indigenous people. The continent of America, in the eyes of the settlers, becomes a land of infinite possibility where they can get rid of the shackles of their old past and have a "fresh start" by their own hands. It is in this historical context that Cooper contemplates the relationship between man and nature and is concerned with how Americans build a new society based upon democracy and law. However, when nature is confronted by civilization, there are prices to pay. With trees felled, rivers drained, land tilled, wilderness tamed, and people displaced, the westward movement leads to the heedless destruction of the wild nature and the conflicts between the pioneers and the Indians. *The Prairie*, with its elegiac tone, is about the passing not merely of old Leatherstocking but also of an ideal natural order before the inevitable advance of civilization. I argue that the existence of Leatherstocking still illustrated Cooper's uneasiness with and questioning of the whole progress of westward movement if the American settlers continue ravaging the landscape without taking serious notice of its consequences. Throughout his Leatherstocking Tales, Cooper makes use of the character of Leatherstocking to critique the ills of civilization in their wasteful exploitations of nature. Although the march of progress into the western territories is seen as inevitable in the nineteenth-century America, Cooper's Leatherstocking still represents an alternative voice for morality and harmonious ways of life with nature. In Cooper's view, the death of Leatherstocking in the American west is tragic because his death is a symbol of the loss of higher moral possibility for the future of America. However, with the displacement of the original inhabitants of the continent, Cooper uses Leatherstocking as an idealized "white noble savage," "a man without cross," as the model for an all-white American future.

At the outset of the novel, Leatherstocking has "lighted out for the territory" as a fugitive from the settlement of civilization to escape "the sound of the axe" and the civil law that has restrained his independent relationship with nature. Although Leatherstocking intends to get beyond the accursed sounds of the axes, unfortunately he still cannot escape the ceaseless crash of falling trees. He is hounded by the encroachment of the squatters and homesteaders since Ishmael Bush and his sons, a new representative of squatters of the wilderness, have followed the westward movement into the plains. Casting "a keen and bright wood-axe across his shoulder," Ishmael Bush is "a tall, sun-burnt man, past the middle age, of a dull countenance and listless manner" and his "frame appeared loose and flexible; but it was vast, and in reality of prodigious power" (12). Later, Ishmael Bush's sons invades a grove of cotton-wood trees with their axes to prepare an encampment for the night. As Cooper describes,

> At length the eldest of the sons stepped heavily forward, and, without any apparent effort, he buried his axe to the eye in the soft body of a cotton-wood tree. He stood, a moment, regarding the effect of the blow, with that sort of contempt with which a giant might be supposed to contemplate the puny resistance of a dwarf, and then flourishing the implement above his head, with the grace and dexterity with which a master of the art of offense would wield his nobler though less useful weapon, he quickly severed the trunk of the tree, bringing its tall top crashing to the earth, in submission to his prowess. (18-19)

With his axe, the eldest son cut a tree with "contempt" and finally the tree crashes to the earth as a "submission to his prowess." For Cooper, the axe symbolizes man's domination over nature. The Bush clan has effectually stripped a small spot of forest "as if a whirlwind had passed along the place" (19). At the same time, Leatherstocking, "a silent, but attentive

observer of their progress," looks upward at "the vacancies they left in the heavens, with a melancholy gaze" (19). For Cooper, the Bush family represents the outcasts of society who ravage the wilderness in a destructive manner because they chop the trees and clear the place just for a night's camp. Thus, in many respects, Bush is like Billy Kirby in *The Pioneers* who has made the sounds of the axe ceaseless and calls "no country much improved, that is pretty well covered with trees" (*The Pioneers* 229). Both of them, to use Paul Hover's words in *The Prairie*, keep "skimming the cream from the face of the earth" (251). Even if Leatherstocking has retreated to the far west, he still feels the sounds of axes and the crash of falling trees following his steps.

The despoliation of the forest suggests the violence that man has done to nature without paying any regard for the consequences. To Abiram White, Ishmael's brother-in-law, nature "was made for our comfort; and, for that matter, so ar' its creatur's" (22). The problem with the ways of the chopper consists in their abuse of their right by placing no reasonable restraint on their use of nature. Without any concern with the well-being of other living creatures, their only criteria for the exploitation of nature are their desires of the moment and the immediate profits they can obtain. If Leatherstocking kills life only out of necessity for his survival, then the settlers of Templeton slaughter the harmless birds just for fun, as if the natural resources were inexhaustible. In *The Prairie*, we can find that the Bush clan is not alone because Cooper employs the Bush to represent one typical kind of pioneers who have come to the west and destroy the natural world.[29] Even Paul Hover, a

[29] As Henry Nash Smith states, "Cooper's interest in Ishmael Bush reflects his lifelong concern with the problem of society in America, especially in the West. One has the feeling sometimes that Ishmael's giant strength, the suggestion in him of unlimited and menacing muscular power and of animal ferocity are a survival of the childhood memories of a great landowner's son whose earliest years were spent amid frontier farmers" (1950, xii).

bee hunter and a young companion, who could shoot a buffalo a day only to enjoy the meat of its hump, is condemned as wasteful because he kills simply to satisfy the greed of his thoughtless desire. Cooper uses the character of Leatherstocking to express his environmental concerns in the age of westward expansion. By seeing so much human folly, Leatherstocking laments: "How much has the beauty of the wilderness been deformed in two short lives" (250). His escape to the west in the long run proves nothing more than an illusion of wish-fulfillment.

The theory of progress is represented by Dr. Obed Battius, a physical scientist, who has come to the prairie in search of new species of plants and animals. Dr. Bat, a man of the Enlightenment, who maintains an intellectual relationship with nature through physical science, is actually what Geoffrey Rans calls "a gross parody of the spirit of experimental reason and education" (Rans 149). Owing to his belief that "classification is the very soul of the Natural Sciences" (77), the gift of instinct, in his view, has become "[an] inferior gradation of reason – a sort of mysterious combination of thought and matter" (181). Through the scientific method of taxonomy, he has imposed an absolute order upon nature. In addition, his belief in man's perfectibility has prompted him to argue "education might eradicate the evil principle" (240). By applying science to nature, man can become "the Master of all learning, and consequently equal to the great moving principle" (180). From this perspective, Bat represents a gross caricature of the rationalist.[30] Moreover, his name, "Bat," suggests not only for his intellectual ignorance, since he is stupidly absorbed in his book knowledge, but also for his obvious blindness to the spiritual reality. Seeing nature

[30] In Cooper's characterization, Dr. Bat is "ridiculed for his narrow interest in recording and classifying, for his ambition to make a name for himself, and for his lack of vision, indicated by his name" (Ringe 1999, xi).

only in the abstract, he is a scientist whose vision is shaped by his narrow preconceptions. The egoism of Dr. Bat is what Leatherstocking criticizes sharply:

> I have heard that there are men among my people who study their great medicines until they believe themselves to be Gods, and who laugh at all faith except in their own vanities. It may be true. It *is* true; for I have seen them. When man is shut up in towns and schools with his own follies, it may be easy to believe himself greater than the Master of Life. (211)

In Cooper's view, the fact that Dr. Bat embodies a new attitude toward nature should be taken seriously because his attitude is not only a potentially threatening one but also a exploitative one. Dr. Bat represents an assumption that "man can do as he pleases with the natural environment, subjecting it to his will" (Ringe 1999, xi). In the name of progress, what the scientists have done is the "improvement" of nature, that is, man's domination over nature.

To oppose Dr. Bat's rationalist belief, Leatherstocking has developed a religious view of the natural world. Based upon his direct, intuitive outlook on nature, his view is derived from having "lived for seventy years in the very bosom of natur' and where he could at any instant open his heart to God, without having to strip it of the cares and wickedness of the settlements" (250). Leatherstocking is portrayed as an idealized frontiersman with self-possession because he reveres the natural world. He respects all forms of life in nature. As Cooper writes,

> "Come forth, come forth," he said aloud, "be ye bird or be ye beast, ye are safe from these old hands. I have eaten and I have drunk, why should I take life, when my wants call for no sacrifice. It will not be long afore the birds will peck at eyes that shall not see them, and perhaps light on my very bones, for

if things like these are only made to perish, why am I to expect to live forever. Come, forth. Come, forth! You are safe from harm at these weak hands." (83)

Throughout the novel, Leatherstocking is the only one who lives in the prairie with self-restraint. The law of nature he follows has prevented him from any wanton abuse of nature. Leatherstocking, as James Fenimore Cooper claims in his "Preface to the Leatherstocking Tales" (1850), is "a being who finds the impress of the Deity in all the works of nature" (460). What he sees in woods and sky, and what he hears in the winds are his perceptions of nature as the revelation of a divine God. In fact, Leatherstocking perceives the forest as more than trees since it signifies a sacred place that has transcended man and history. Leatherstocking believes that everything God has created has their inherent value: "things seem ordered to meet each other, in this creation" (76). Therefore, Leatherstocking views the natural world in terms of the smallness of humans with respect to the boundlessness of God's universe. For him, humans should be humble because the immensity of nature and the creation of God expose the limitations of human beings.

Wild nature has its value as a source of beauty and morality for Leatherstocking. Dr. Bat's book knowledge, in Leatherstocking's view, can tell him nothing about "the beginning and the end" of things and the meaning of life and death: "Why does the eagle live, so long, and why is the time of the butterfly so short?" (181). Dr. Bat, as Donald A. Ringe states, "looks at nature with myopic eyes and ignores those questions which fill the trapper's mind with wonder" (1999, 181). In a long debate with Dr. Bat, Leatherstocking raises the idea of the desolate prairie as a warning to the complacent American civilization. Leatherstocking argues that there is once a civilization upon the prairie and the moral failure of human pride and wickedness have swept it away without leaving any trace of

"monument" behind it:[31]

> I remember to have heard it, then and there said that the blessed Land was once fertile as the bottoms of the Mississippi, and groaning with its stores of grain and fruits; but that the judgment has since fallen upon it, and that it is now more remarkable for its barrenness than any qualities to boast of. (239)

Here Cooper creates a lost indigenous civilization on the prairie and attributes human and environmental causes for its disappearance. As Laura L. Mielke comments, "[s]elfishness and carelessness lie at the heart of human history and imprint themselves on the earth; the prairie is barren because of the wastefulness of previous, ancient populations, and God's judgement upon them. (Mielke 2008, 41). In Leatherstocking's view, the fact that the once fertile garden has been transformed into a futile wasteland can serve as a warning message to the greedy settlers.[32] If the settlers continue seeking their fortune on the large-scale

---

[31] Matthew Wynn Sivils, in his article "Doctor Bat's Ass: Buffon, American Degeneracy, and Cooper's *The Prairie*" (2010), argues that Cooper employs Dr. Bat as "a critic of Buffon's ideas and as an exemplar of the very failings Cooper saw in the Eurocentric brand of Enlightenment science promoted by Buffon and his followers." (344). Citing the Egyptian pyramids as monument to a culture's adulthood in the past, Dr. Bat "echoes Buffon's view of American Indians as childlike beings who have failed to improve themselves and, in turn, their world." (356). For Dr. Bat, "the barren prairie stands as proof of the degeneracy of the American Indians, a race yet to reach the same cultural adulthood the Egyptians attained, and lost, centuries ago" (356). In addition, Sivils contends that Leatherstocking also applies "Buffon's ideas about degeneracy evenly across continents, arguing for a cyclical understanding of social development and cultural decomposition, thus indicating that America is no young world, but rather an exceedingly old one in which even its ruins of former glory have crumbled into dust" (357). In order to refute Buffon's theory of degeneracy, Cooper, as Sivils points out, attempts to "rehabilitate the image of the American Indian" by making his Indian characters "cunning, perceptive, and physically powerful beyond all reality" in *The Prairie* (357).

[32] A similar view of regarding the desolate prairie as a warning was expressed by a poet of Cooper's contemporary, William Cullen Bryant, in his poem "An Indian at the Burial Place of His Fathers," written

clearings without considering the environmental consequences of their actions, they will simply court the destruction that has been visited upon those before them.[33] However, for his readers, Cooper's imagination of a prior Indian civilization lost due to their own causes of "selfishness" and "wickedness" can also serve as a literary means to displace the white guilt over the violent removal and dispossession by accrediting the faults to the Indians themselves.

Cooper further makes use of Leatherstocking's argument for a cyclical understanding of human civilization as not only an environmental lesson but also an excuse to validate the disappearance of the Indian. For Leatherstocking, works of human, like all things in nature, are mutable: "It is the fate of all things, to ripen, and then to decay" (241).

---

in 1824. Following the romantic tradition, Bryant used the doomed but noble Indian as his speaker, whose race was vanishing and driven away by white man's Westward Expansion.

> They waste us — ay — like April snow
> In the warm noon, we shrink away;
> And fast they follow, as we go
> Toward the setting day —
> Till they shall fill the land, and we
> Are driven into the Western sea. (I: 95)

Witnessing the wasted ruins over the prairie, this Indian warned his white counterpart: "Their race may vanish hence, like mine / And leave no trace behind" (I: 95). The poem ended with a vision similar to Cooper's.

> Those grateful sounds are heard no more,
> The springs are silent in the sun;
> The rivers, by the blackened shore,
> With lessening current run;
> The realm our tribes are crushed to get
> May be a barren desert yet. (I: 96)

[33] As Lance Schachterle points out, "perhaps some of Cooper's first readers grasped his point: that growing American empire might also suffer the fate of these lost Indian civilizations" (127).

Turning to nature for his reply to Dr. Bat, Leatherstocking has likened the course of civilization to the fruit of the tree: “The tree blossoms, and bears its fruit, which falls, rots, withers, and even the seed is lost” (241). The tree, used as “the exemplar of the organic cycle of time,” not only indicated “the way of nature and course of civilization” but also provided “a vehicle for repudiating the idea of progress” (Axelrad 1978, 60). It is the law of nature that everything that “rises” must “fall.” As Leather-stocking meditates, “As if that was not enough to convince man of his ignorance, and as though it were put there in mockery of his conceit, a pine shoots up from the roots of the oak, just as barrenness comes after fertility, or as these wastes have been spread, where a garden may have been created” (241). Nevertheless, Leatherstocking’s cyclical understanding of human civilization and his metaphor of tree for the rise and fall of a civilization can also serve the national needs to justify the departure of the Indians as a natural and inevitable historical process. According to Leatherstocking’s view of the law of nature, there is nothing to be done to prevent the fall of a civilization as there is nothing to be done to stop the inevitable extinction of an inferior race. Following this reasoning, the previous “civilization” must disappear and leave the continent vacant for the rise of a new civilization.

One theme of *The Prairie*, from the perspective, is certainly the passing of the Indian. With the advance of U.S. imperialism, the image of “noble savage” has been transformed into that of “ignoble savage” in the historical context of imperial expansion because they have to be portrayed not as one to be lived with, but as one whose existence is an impediment to the establishment of a white empire. As Hard-Heart, a Pawnee chief, protests in *The Prairie*: “Your warriors think the Master of Life has made the whole earth white…” (195). The Indians, in their inferior state of savagery, are viewed as a threat and barrier to the building of a continental nation. Throughout *The Prairie*, Cooper’s

descriptions of the Sioux are replete with references to snakes and serpents. For example, as Cooper writes, "it could not fail to be seen by the devils, whose eyes are keener than the blackest snake's!" (39); "they had wormed their way through the matted grass, like so many treacherous serpents stealing on their prey" (49). The image, as Matthew J. C. Cella states, "not only suggests their primitive nature but also reveals the characteristics that make the Sioux particularly savage: their greed and lustfulness. This revelation is significant to Cooper's presentation of the Sioux as the most primitive tribe on the plains" (Cella 27). In Cooper's "Introduction" (1832) to *The Prairie*, the great prairie of the American west has become "the final gathering place of the red men" (4). The Indians have been removed or have retreated to the far west. After years of warfare, disease, and displacement, the Indian power to resist American expansion has been undercut. With the destruction and expropriation of their homelands, the Indians and their cultures have been destroyed by the white civilization. Eventually, the West is "won" by white settlers.

Following his literary formula of good Indian versus bad Indian, Cooper employs his Indian stereotypes not for the welfare of the Indian but for his critique of the white civilization. In *The Prairie*, the Indians face the predicament of white men's invasion and the conflicts among themselves. The final confrontation between Hard-Heart and Mahtoree is the climax in the battle between the Pawnee and the Sioux. Mahtoree, the Sioux chief, expresses his worries about the conflicts among the tribes as he tells his great rival Hard-Heart:

> Now let not the mind of my brother go on a crooked path. If a red-skin strikes a red-skin, forever, who will be masters of the Prairies, when no warriors are left to say they are mine. Hear the voices of the old men. They tell us, that, in their days, many Indians have come out of the woods, under the rising sun,

> and that they have filled the Prairies with their complaints of the robberies of the Long-knives. Where a Pale-face comes, a red-man cannot stay. The land is too small. They are always hungry. See, they are here already. (334-35)

This passage would remind Cooper's readers of Magua's words near the end of *The Last of the Mohicans:* "The Hurons love their friends the Delawares…Why should they not? they are colored by the same sun, and their just men will hunt in the same grounds after death. The red-skins should be friends, and look with open eyes on the white men" (327). Both Mahtoree and Magua call for the union of tribes to put up resistance to the encroachment of "hungry" settlers. However, Mahtoree is after all killed by Hard-Heart but his words foreshadow the common fate of the Indians. Both tribes, the Pawnee and the Sioux, would be displaced soon by the impending encroachment of the American settlers. "If Pawnee against Sioux recapitulates Mohican against Huron," as Donald A. Ringe states, "the lesson is unmistakable; only the whites can win" (1988a, 46). In *The Prairie,* Cooper describes the Indians as "the rightful owners of the country" (27), the "more lawful, occupants, of the country" (107), and "this wronged and humbled people" (185). I suggest Cooper's emphasis on the Indians as the "rightful" owners of the land has served as a means to displace the white guilt over American settlers' invasion and dispossession of the indigenous homelands.[34] Even early in the novel, one of the Indian characters indicts the white men for the usurpation of their lands: "Have not the Pale-faces stolen enough from the Red men… I have said this is s hunting ground of my tribe" (44). By turning "a hunting ground" into a "virgin land," the settlers justify their invasion and occupation.

The death of Leatherstocking signifies the passing of values he represents and a

---

[34] As John P. McWilliams says, "Cooper's affirmations of the westward course of empire are always uneasy, undermined by his guilt over the worth and the rights of those who have been effaced" (1995, 109).

moral possibility for the American future. Cooper, in his "Introduction" (1849) to *The Prairie*, concludes the career of his hero: "Here he passes the few closing years of his life, dying as he had lived, a philosopher of the wilderness, with few of the failings, none of the vices, and all the nature and truth of his position" (6). Leatherstocking's life finally comes to an end as a true mythic figure when his death in the American far West is depicted as apotheosis. The scene of glorious sunset in the West that echoes his first appearance in the novel provides not only a grand setting for the end of an American Adam's life but also a somber close for The Leatherstocking Tales.

> When opened his gaze seemed fastened on the clouds which hung around the western horizon, reflecting the bright colors and giving form and loveliness to the glorious tints of an American sunset. The hour – the calm beauty of the season – the occasion all conspired to fill the spectators with solemn awe. (385)

The poignant elegiac note at the end of *The Prairie* serves to sound a mournful recognition that a man whose long life has been spent in such close intimacy with nature eventually comes to an end. His final gaze, fixed upon the western horizon, with his pronouncing his last word "Here," symbolizes his contemplation upon the meaning of the West, and American national destiny in the future.[35] The death of Leatherstocking reveals Cooper's vision of a lost second chance, a chance to fulfill America's original promise, a society that is both free and law-abiding, in harmony with the natural environment and its fellow peoples. Mulling over the land of America, Leatherstocking seems to lament the end of an

---

[35] With the passing of Leatherstocking in the American west, critics have debated about the meaning of his death. Sarah Klotz argues that Leatherstocking's final word "places him and the white American nation on the prairie. The emphasis on place at the key sentimental moment of death only strengthens the land claim of the white American" (354). Laura L. Mielke contends that Cooper "used deathbeds and gravesites to inspire readers sympathy and to close in Indian-white encounter with the fulfillment of Indian doom" (36).

era: "When I am gone there will be an end of my race" (383). His death suggests the passing not only of his life but also of his spiritual view of the world, of his moral as a possibility in the New World. His values are forever lost in American life since clearly men will not follow his moral path.[36]

The American frontier, if seen from the Indian's perspectives, is a place of conflict, removal, and genocide. Although Leatherstocking's death is described in sentimental terms, Cooper is in fact concerned what the United States as a nation will become of following Leatherstocking's death. In the nineteenth-century America, the westward course of U.S. imperialism had advanced under the flag of progress. However, Cooper never fails to recognize the evils of such advances. Cooper would be "too sensitive not to be aware of the irrevocable wrongs the progress of the United States throughout its history had brought upon the aboriginal inhabitants of the continent" (Överland 164-65). For Cooper, the wrongs done by the imperial expansionism of white settlers on the environmental destruction and indigenous displacement signifies the moral failure of American civilization. Leatherstocking 's death thus suggests a lost possibility of living at rapport with nature and a "wasted potential of a multicultural continent." (Mielke 39). Nevertheless, as I will suggest, Cooper's ultimate concern is the moral character of the United States as a nation, rather than the well-being of the Native Americans. In *The Prairie*, Cooper's

[36] Leatherstocking, as James D. Wallace illustrates, "stalks like an exasperated conscience through their scenes of slaughter – first of the pigeons, then of the lake fish – contemptuously showing how to live with nature rather than against it, but already knowing that the lesson is lost on those who need it most. He represents a missed opportunity in American history, the possibility that European immigrants might have joined with Native Americans rather than dispossessing and killing them, and that from the merging of the two cultures might have come something new in the earth, a people free, proud, and self-reliant without the pettifoggery, greed, and corruption that have infected the history of American culture. Natty is a living rebuke to a society that has all but forgotten its original promise" (Wallace xii).

repeated emphasis on the Indian as the "rightful" owner of the continent uncovers his desire to alleviate the white guilt over the wrongs done to the Native Americans in the Removal policy and the ongoing violence of dispossession. In addition, Cooper employs Leatherstocking as a "white" noble savage to critique the ills of his society and embodies in him the idealized values for the American future. From this perspective, Leatherstocking has served Cooper's purpose as an idealized white model for a white American future as he repeatedly claims he is "a man without a cross" in *The Last of the Mohicans*. At the end of *The Prairie*, Cooper creates a sentimental scene for mourning over the death of a white man in the "Indian country" against the setting sun while the indigenous people are being killed and displaced in their resistance to the encroachment of white settlers who target at their homeland and their disappearance.[37] Faced with the Anglo-American invasion, the Indians can only retreat to the farther West with their fate doomed.[38]

The westward mission of Manifest Destiny leads to the establishment of civilization at the cost of the environmental destruction and the displacement of the Indians. In *The Prairie*, Cooper has expressed his reservation about westward expansion in his character Leatherstocking's protests against the violence that American settlers have done to nature,

---

[37] In his *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (2013), Walter L. Hixson points out, "American settler colonialism ultimately drove an ethnic cleansing of the continent"; "American settler colonialism evolved over the course of three centuries, resulting in millions of deaths and displacements" (Hixson 2013, 1). In *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (2007), Daniel Walker Howe comments on the Indian Removal, "Martin Van Buren correctly predicted that the issue of Indian Removal would 'occupy the minds and feelings of our people' for generations to com. Today Americans deplore the expropriation and expulsion of racial minorities, a practice now called 'ethnic cleansing'" (Howe 422-423).

[38] As Angela L. Miller claims in her study of the nineteenth-century American arts, "Many were able to imagine only one future for Native societies: to move progressively westward toward the setting sun, and inevitably toward extinction" (Miller 2008, 222).

but not to the Indians. Leatherstocking is a figure so independent, self-contained and humble. However, he is besieged by the greed, arrogance, and impulsiveness of pioneers, like Ishmael Bush and his family. Leatherstocking, as D. H. Lawrence states, is "an isolate, almost selfless, stoic, enduring man," a man who always "keeps his moral integrity hard and intact" (Lawrence 69). With humility and reverence for nature, he serves as the spokesman for the proper use of nature, an early voice for modern environmentalism.[39] The loss of Leatherstocking and what he represents is lamentable.[40] However, Cooper uses Leatherstocking as a "white" noble savage to critique the social and cultural conditions of his society and embodies in him the idealized values for a white American future. Cooper is actually more concerned with problems of society, that is, how an orderly and civilized society is to be created in the frontier based on democracy and law. The civil society supported by Middleton and Hover is the only practical and possible, if still defective, hope for the American future while the Indians, displaced and destroyed, have no place in the project of American nation-making.

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have read Cooper's first three Leatherstocking Tales in a chronological way, showing how a wilderness is constructed as a "virgin land" by

---

[39] Leatherstocking, with his practices of humility and self-control toward the natural environment, is "the first character in American fiction to at least *promise* entry [into nature] without violation" (Emphasis original; Kolodny 1975, 104).

[40] As Donald A. Ringe suggests, "an ideal is lost when Leatherstocking and all that he represents in humility, self-control, reverence for God, and respect for nature comes to an end on the prairie" (Ringe 1999, xix).

dispossessing indigenous people of their homelands. By demonizing the native inhabitants that dwell in a forest hostile to the white settlers, Cooper, along with the Puritan settlers, justifies the nation-building project of removing Indians and subduing the wilderness in *The Last of the Mohicans*. *The Pioneers* shows how a frontier community is founded on a "virgin land" that is in fact the product of a history of conquest and displacement. In this post-removal society, the white settlers are engaged in improving the land and even exploiting natural resources in a wasteful manner. Their different attitudes toward nature demonstrate their competing environmental ethics: anthropocentrism, utilitarianism, and spiritualism. *The Prairie* reveals Cooper's anxiety about the course of American westward expansion. With the death of Leatherstocking on the Western landscape, Cooper ponders on the meaning of the West for the future of America. Although Leatherstocking represents an idealized relationship with nature and the racial others, the Indians, Cooper employs him as an idealized white noble savage to critique the ills of the civilization and as a lost chance for a better society. However, Leatherstocking as a white man serves Cooper's purpose as a model for a white American future while the Indians are destroyed and removed. Throughout the three novels, Cooper's good Indians help the white and then die, giving their land to the white civilization, while the bad Indians, with their inferior savagery, must be exterminated. Cooper's stereotypes functions to expiate the national guilt over the displacement of the Indians, further justifying the Indian Removal policy in his own time. Read together, Cooper's novels show his lifelong concern how a civil society is built upon the rule of law and how the progress of America is grounded in Christian terms. After all, rather than offer a critique of indigenous dispossession and imperial expansion, Cooper is concerned with man's relationship with nature and how the pioneering works have caused damage on the natural environment in the development of a civil society in the frontier.

Cooper's representations of the Indians as stereotypes have allowed him to lament the destruction of nature in a settler colonial society but not the devastation of the indigenous people who make their homeland in the natural environment.

Chapter two

"I Become a Transparent Eye-Ball": The White Imagination and Transcendental Blindness in Emerson and Whitman

I listen long
To his domestic hum, and think I hear
The sound of that advancing multitude
Which soon shall fill these deserts. From the ground
Comes up the laugh of children, the soft voice
Of maidens, and the sweet and solemn hymn
Of Sabbath worshippers. The low of herds
Blends with the rustling of the heavy grain
Over the dark brown furrows. All at once
A fresher wind sweeps by, and breaks my dream,
And I am in the wilderness alone.

William Cullen Bryant, "The Prairies" (1832)

And the evening sun descending
Set the clouds on fire with redness,
Burned the broad sky, like a prairie,
Left upon the level water
One long track and trail of splendor
Down whose stream, as down a river,
Westward, westward Hiawatha
Sailed into the fiery sunset,
Sailed into the purple vapors,
Sailed into the dusk of evening.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855)

This chapter explores how the transcendental experience of nature becomes naturalized as a norm by focusing on works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman.

By examining these two Transcendentalists' racial privilege in their imaginative positions, I argue that they mistake whiteness as transparency in their transcendental visions. I read their imaginations of nature or America as a "human-free" space in the nineteenth-century historical context of Indian Removal and Indian Wars, a process of transforming America from an "Indian wilderness" to an "Indian-free wilderness."[1] From this perspective, I suggest that the "people-free" space Emerson constructs in his works is actually a "white space," a space marked with his racial privilege to walk freely in wild nature and seek a transcendental vision of freedom, sublimity, and self-edification at a time when slaves were forced to toil on the land and Native Americans were removed from their homelands. Whitman, with the privilege to speak for racial others, constructs a vision of America as an "Indian-free" land. By examining Emerson's and Whitman's representations of the Indian in their works, I suggest that Emerson is more concerned with the moral character of the nation rather than the welfare of the Indians while Whitman is involved in the imaginative removal to construct a white America.

First, I read Emerson's *Nature* (1836) with its contributions and limitations as an environmental text. From an ecocritical perspective, *Nature* shows Emerson's ambivalence between his proto-ecological celebration of nature for its spiritual value at a time of utilitarianism and his anthropocentric emphasis on man as the center of his inquiry. By further juxtaposing *Nature* with its historical context of slavery and Indian Removal, I suggest that Emerson's transcendental experience of nature is constructed as white

---

[1] In *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (1999), Mark David Spence explores how America is transformed from an "Indian wilderness" into an "Indian-free wilderness" by focusing on issues of 'the creation of an extensive reservation system," the cultural construct of wilderness, and the making of national parks. His major argument is that "uninhabited wilderness had to be created before it could be preserved" (Spence 4).

experience. Even though Emerson reluctantly writes a letter to President Martin Van Buren (1838) to protest against the Cherokee Removal, Emerson is ultimately concerned with the moral character of the United States and the American people rather than the welfare of the Indians. Then, I continue to examine Whitman's imperialist vision of America as an "Indian-free" land in his works. Whitman exploits the literary potential of the Transcendental "I" to its fullest. His globalizing vision, like the nineteenth-century America's relentless imperial expansionism, channels the voices of others through his own voice. However, when Whitman embraces all and speaks for them, he silences the voices of others. In the early phase of his career, Whitman's strong sense of egalitarian humanitarianism produces a democratic portrait of the United States by absorbing the Native American as an equal member of the union. However, as Whitman's racial views began to take a conservative turn after the Civil War, he represents the Indian as a vanishing race. In his poems, like "Starting from Paumanok" and "Yonnondio," Whitman envisions that the Indians disappear from the land. In "Starting from Paumanok" and "Pioneers! O Pioneers!," Whitman portrays the West as a "virgin land" available for white settlers. In "Song of the Redwood-Tree," Whitman imagines that the ancient big trees depart willingly and leave the land vacant for the present and future of a superior race. In the historical context of Indian Wars in postbellum United States, it is difficult not to associate the self-abdication of redwood-trees with the systematic dispossession of "red aborigines." Therefore, Whitman's poems show a transcendental vision that turns forced removal into peaceful disappearance.

I. Emerson's *Nature* as Environmental Text

Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature*, published in 1836, is the key text of American

Transcendentalism and has established his reputation as a philosopher and writer.[2] This short essay provides Emerson's basic but crucial thoughts and insights into the relationship between people and nature in an era of rapid industrialization and westward settlement. As a thinker, however, Emerson never presents a straightforward guidebook detailing our relations to nature; rather, he gives his readers materials to discern "an original relation to the universe" (*CW* I:3). Deeply immersed in the European romantic philosophy of his day, Emerson argues that the elements of the nonhuman world are symbols of a greater spiritual Deity he calls "Oversoul." In Emerson's view, the human mind can seek the spiritual truth by reading nature directly. Thus, by breaking up with the dogmatic stagnancy of his Unitarian church, Emerson emphasizes the divinity of each individual's soul, the spiritual value of nature, and the correspondence between the two. Emerson's *Nature*, as Paul Brooks says, "opened the way to an esthetic and even a religious delight in natural scenery" (Brooks 36). From Emerson's perspective, each individual has the potential to transcend physical senses through a heightened intuition to reach a vision of truth and freedom. The natural world serves as a vehicle for a higher intellectual or spiritual state. As Rochelle L.

---

[2] Although Emerson's *Nature* (1836) is the key text for inspiring American Transcendentalism, the major concern, in its historical context of the 1830s, is not the study of nature, but the religious and social reform. As Philip F. Gura states, "When American Transcendentalism emerged in the early 1830s, the study of nature was not a chief concern of the coterie who embraced new currents in European philosophy and religion and applied them to their own situation as Unitarians"; "These individuals were drawn to the 'New Thought' as a way to revivify a Christianity whose adherents were devoted to religious and social reform not from a belief that a deeper understanding of nature brought one closer to the spiritual life" (Gura 2010, 410). Daniel G. Payne holds a similar view by stating, "For many of Emerson's contemporaries, *Nature* was not only a release from the ossified dogma of traditional religious teaching but an intellectual declaration of independence as well. In his call for a break from the outdated traditions from the past, and for an 'original relation to the universe,' Emerson opened the door to a new way of seeing the world" (Payne 31).

Johnson states, “Nature is thus a metaphor for the human capacity to reason, and in inquiring into nature's existence we are inquiring into our own” (Johnson 154). By encouraging each individual to strive for the higher use of nature, Emerson has granted individual self-improvement a spiritual and religious sanction.

From an ecocritical perspective, to what extent can Emerson’s *Nature* be read as an environmental text? If Emerson and his writings have inspired Thoreau, Muir, and even other nature writers in the United States and all over the world, in what ways does Emerson’s most proto-ecological text shed light on our thinking about the relationship between humans and the nonhuman world? Before we inquire further into this question, we must first take a look at the historical context in which *Nature* was written and published. With rapid industrial growth and territorial expansion after the Louisiana Purchase, the antebellum United States was no longer a “Nature’s Nation.” The great, fertile North America’s continent had not apparently brought forth a great people as Jefferson had anticipated. Instead, the natural world had been plundered of its rich natural resources. As Alexis de Tocqueville observes,

> In Europe people talk a great deal of the wilds of America, but the Americans themselves never think about them; they are insensible to the wonders of inanimate nature and they may be said not to perceive the mighty forests that surround them till they fall beneath the hatchet. Their eyes are fixed upon another sight: the American people views its own march across these wilds, draining swamps, turning the course of rivers, peopling solitudes, and subduing nature. (Tocqueville 429-430)

For American settlers, the wilderness was seen generally as an obstacle to overcome unless it could be transformed into raw materials for building and advancing the civilization.

Nature and its abundant resources served merely utilitarian purpose to settlers. Only when the wild land was "improved" by their will and work did the settlers see signs of "progress." Therefore, it is in this historical context that Emerson seeks an alternative, a "higher use" of nature other than commodity and materialist profits.[3]

Emerson's *Nature* is widely viewed as not only a starting point for American Transcendentalism, but also as an earlier example of American nonfiction that has inspired a romantic outlook of nature. As Donald Worster puts it, *Nature* "might even be described as a manifesto for an important strain of Romantic ecological thought" (1977, 103). In another essay "Man the Reformer," Emerson criticizes the general public's fetish with monetary value in his own society: "The Americans have little faith. They rely on the power of a dollar; they are deaf to a sentiment" (*CW* I:249). When in *Nature* Emerson states that "in the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages" (*CW* I:10), he regards wild nature as the environment where spiritual truths are revealed. The natural world, for Emerson, is endowed with spiritual and religious insights; in this view, Emerson expresses a different sense of the worth of the nonhuman world, a viewpoint that stands against the dominant ideology of American society with its utilitarian assumption concerning the value of nature. Furthermore, as Transcendentalism has evolved and developed, nature changes from a source for spiritual pursuit into the threatened soil of human society. From this perspective, the Transcendentalist idea of nature "very quickly developed into a comprehensive critique of capitalism that combined proto-environmentalist attitudes with radical ideas about social reform" (Newman 172). In

[3] As James C. McKusick states, "By attributing the immanence of such divine energies to the natural world, Emerson seeks to redeem the American landscape from the merely utilitarian conception of its possibilities that was rampant in his own time" (McKusick 132-133).

Nature, Emerson privileges nature itself with a spiritual significance that few has accorded it before, a refutation of the utilitarian commodification of nature simply as raw materials or natural resources.

In *Nature* Emerson opens his exploration by encouraging his readers to abandon their "retrospective" viewpoints on matters such as poetry, philosophy, and religion in favor of new, fresh perspectives. In order to "enjoy an original relation to the universe," Emerson expresses an optimistic belief in a new insight gained directly from a mystical union with God through nature. "Embosomed for a season in nature," as Emerson describes, "whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe?" (*CW* I:3). Instead of delving into "dry bones of the past" for spiritual truth, Emerson suggests we turn our eyes to the natural world surrounding us. In fact, Emerson's search for a new insight and relationship in *Nature* also reflects his seeking for a new life after a series of deaths of his family members had grieved him profoundly.[4] *Nature*, as Lance Newman notes, "was composed in the heat of intense grief and personal conversion, so it fairly boils over with its vision of an individual life of the mind and spirit rooted in the physical world" (Newman 173). Hence, in this biographical context, Emerson endeavors to answer the ambitious question he puts forth on the essay's first page: "Let us inquire, to what end is nature?" (*CW* I:4). As he is beginning a new life from his family bereavement and faith crisis, Inspired by European romantic thinkers like Coleridge and Carlyle, Emerson begins to develop his own philosophy on the relationship between "me" and "not-me." Instead of

[4] Emerson's first wife Ellen Tucker Emerson died in 1831; Emerson's brother Edward died in 1834, and Charles died in 1836.

studying the scripture for truth, Emerson suggests the seeker should explore nature, that is, "all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME": "Nature, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf" (*CW* I:4-5). In Emerson's view, nature reflects the divinity and thus can provide spiritual instructions to man. Nature, instead of the written scripture, becomes a new and direct source of truth.

Nature serves a "nobler want" of mankind by providing "beauty" to satisfy our desire for beautiful things and inspire our creative spirits to imitate its beauty in action and art. On the basic level, the beauty of the natural world pleases our eyes: "Such is the constitution of all things, or such the plastic power of the human eye, that the primary forms, as the sky, the mountain, the tree, the animal, give us a delight in and for themselves; a pleasure arising from outline, color, motion, and grouping" (*CW* I:15). For Emerson, nature furnishes humans with different standards of beauty, whether of physical beauty, moral beauty (virtue), or spiritual beauty (truth): "The standard of beauty is the entire circuit of natural forms – the totality of nature" (*CW* I:23-24). Regarding the physical beauty, it is inherent in its "lowest functions" of nature: "the simple perception of natural forms is a delight" (*CW* I:16). What one needs is "attentive eyes" to see the beauty of nature everywhere: "To the attentive eye, each moment of the year has its own beauty, and in the same field, it beholds, every hour, a picture which was never seen before, and which shall never be seen again. The heavens change every moment, and reflect their glory or gloom on the plains beneath" (*CW* I:18). For Emerson, however, there is a higher form of nature's beauty if combined with human action. As Emerson states, "The high and divine beauty which can be loved without effeminacy, is that which is found in combination with the human will. Beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue. Every natural action is graceful.

Every heroic act is also decent, and causes the place and the bystanders to shine" (*CW* I:19-20). In other words, while human deeds receive additional meaning through the beauty of nature in which they take place, the beauty of human heroic actions also enhances "the beauty of the scene" (*CW* I:20). Finally, the beauty of the natural world is significant in a third way that clearly abstracts nature from its physical context. Beauty becomes "an object of the intellect" (*CW* I:22). That is, nature inspires humans to seek beauty intellectually not only through heroic deeds, but also through the cultivation of "Taste" in art: "This love of beauty is Taste. Others have the same love in such excess, that, not content with admiring, they seek to embody it in new forms. The creation of beauty is Art" (*CW* I:23). Hence, for Emerson, the beauty of nature is beneficial to the human soul.

Emerson's *Nature* is replete with tropes of sight and blindness. In Emerson's viewpoint, the human eye plays a crucial role in discerning the beauty and spiritual truth of nature. If one does not see nature, one does not see the divinity in nature as well as in one's soul. Only sight can contribute to insight. "The eye," as Robert D. Richardson, Jr. points out, "is Emerson's great symbol" (Richardson 1995, 155). However, most of the people in Emerson's society are blinded by their utilitarian short-sightedness. As Emerson writes,

> To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows.

(*CW* I:8-9)

For Emerson, the act of seeing is transformative, as those who see nature not only see the outward appearance of nature but their own inward nature, through the correspondence between "me" and "not-me." In other words, to open one's eyes is to open one's own mind.[5] The key to seeing nature lies in the perceiver. As Emerson illustrates in his later essay "Nature" (1844), "The difference between landscape and landscape is small, but there is great difference in the beholders. There is nothing so wonderful in any particular landscape as the necessity of being beautiful under which every landscape lies" (*CW* III:176). In Emerson's view, only through redeeming one's own soul from the disunity and dormancy can each individual see nature with restored "sight."[6]

The "transparent eyeball" passage marks the most important proto-ecological moment in which one's self-importance vanishes and then one becomes a part of God's universe through a mystical union with nature. Emerson first describes his experience of ecstasy when he walks in a bare common, a fundamentally social space that is denuded of people. For Emerson, a man is reborn again in wild nature by becoming exhilarated by the sensational delight of nature like a child, with his long-lost sense of wonder recuperated. The human mind is reinvigorated with spiritual energies in "these plantations of God."

---

[5] As Philip F. Gura states, "One does not turn to [Emerson's Nature] for memorable descriptions of the natural world but rather to be enjoined to open one's eyes to the world to see what always is there but which, in our self-imposed blindness, too frequently lies unobserved" (2010, 411).

[6] As Emerson writes in *Nature* (1836), "The problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty is solved by the redemption of the soul. The ruin or the blank that we see when we look at nature, is in our own eye. The axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things, and so they appear not transparent but opaque. The reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is because man is disunited with himself" (CW I: 73-74).

Moreover, as Douglas R. Anderson states, "as we enter this not-me, this environing Nature, we feel its healing and inspiring powers" (Anderson 154). As Emerson continues,

> In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, -- no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, -- my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, -- all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. (*CW* I:10)

At the critical moment of his epiphany, Emerson blurs the boundary between self and the non-human world. As a transparent eye-ball, Emerson sees the inward and the outward simultaneously, and receives the "currents of the Universal being" as a part of Oversoul. The natural world, as Bruce Plourde indicates, "is proof of a benevolent universe, and nurtures a person into becoming an invisible eyeball who can embrace the loving Oversoul" (Plourde 37). Instead of indulging in narcissistic self-aggrandizement, Emerson in his spiritual enlightenment illuminates a path toward a sense of humility and human's interpenetration with the nonhuman world.[7]

Through a new understanding of nature, Emerson suggests that the spirituality of nature can reflect and spark the divinity of human soul. For Emerson, nature is a repository of spiritual and moral divinity. As Emerson writes,

> There seems to be a necessity in spirit to manifest itself in material forms; and

---

[7] As James C. McKusick points out, "In the context of Emerson's own struggle to devise an alternative to the dominant ideology of American capitalism this image provided him with an effective means to articulate the distinctive quality of his own vision of the ideal relationship between people and their dwelling-places. Emerson's vision is post-humanistic in the sense that it does not take for granted that "man is the measure of all things" or that the world exists merely for human consumption" (McKusick 132).

> day and night, river and storm, beast and bird, acid and alkali, preexist in necessary Ideas in the mind of God, and are what they are by virtue of preceding affections, in the world of spirit. A Fact is the end or last issue of spirit. The visible creation is the terminus or the circumference of the invisible world. (*CW* I: 34-35)

In Emerson's view, the visible world can convey the spiritual message of "the invisible world." Nature, endowed with spirit beyond its materiality, can serve as a pure and direct means of exploring the vital relationship between humanity and divinity. From this perspective, the church, with its scripture and doctrine, is no longer the sole authority; instead, each person can directly get in touch with the divine without the church. Emerson's *Nature*, as Maurice Gonnaud suggests, is "Emersonian revolt against the institutionalization of Spirit" (Gonnaud xvi). Moreover, nature has the potential to awaken the power of human mind to its fullest capacity. As Emerson writes,

> As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God; he is nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws, at his need, inexhaustible power. Who can set bounds to the possibilities of man? Once inhale the upper air, being admitted to behold the absolute natures of justice and truth, and we learn that man has access to the entire mind of the Creator, is himself the creator in the finite. (*CW* I: 64)

The transcendental pursuit of nature is also the quest of divinity in the self. Since nature is emblematic, humans can strive to perfect themselves and realize the full spiritual life within themselves through the correspondence between self and nature. Each individual, as Roderick Nash states, "could discover his own correspondence with the divine being and appreciate his capacity for moral improvement. Every individual, the Transcendentalists

emphasized, possessed this ability" (Nash 2001, 85). Therefore, in Emerson's affirmation of nature's spiritual value for humankind, the natural world is intended for human moral awakening and edification, not for wanton waste as inexhaustible raw materials.

Emerson's *Nature* opens the door not only to a new way of seeing nature but to an appreciation of the wilderness. The howling wilderness of the Puritan forefathers has become a quasi-religious space full of divinity and spiritual promise.[8] In the nineteenth century, influenced by the European romantic philosophy of nature and the aesthetic discourse, the New England intellectuals began to associate wild nature with God and turned to it for inspiration. For Emerson, wild nature becomes "these plantations of God" where a spiritual seeker can experience "an apparition of God" and find "the organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it" (*CW* I: 62). As Emerson writes, "In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature" (*CW* I:10). For Emerson, wild nature not only offers an escape from society, but it also provides the ideal setting for romantic individuals to improve their souls and receive moral instructions.

As more wildlands had been cleared and destroyed by the encroachment of an industrializing civilization in Emerson's time, *Nature* plays a crucial role in the development of the cultural construction of the wilderness as "pristine" space. "Immersed in the wilderness," as Paul Outka states, "the early settlers violently 'restored' an Edenic

---

[8] The Puritans, as Roderick Nash indicates, "feared the innate sinfulness of human nature would run rampant if left to itself in the moral vacuum of wilderness. Men might degenerate to beasts or worse on stepping into the woods. Transcendentalists, on the contrary, saw no such danger in wild country because they believed in man's basic goodness" (Nash 2001, 86).

pastoral; immersed in the settled pastoral, the transcendentalists pined for the ever-retreating wild" (Outka 34). From this perspective, it is not difficult to understand why wilderness appreciation originates among East Coast elites and urbanites who had been separated from wild nature by urban and industrial developments.[9] In *Nature*, Emerson's epiphany takes place in the woods as he is standing "on the bare ground," a cleared land without the presence of people: a space is "open, vast, silent, empty — never dense, obscure (as in a forest), or teeming with people, dwellings, or animals" (Dallal 69). In the nineteenth-century America, by refuting the European notion of North America's landscape as lacking ancient historical associations, the American painters and writers began to worship the sublime wilderness with nationalist fervor.[10] The wilderness, therefore, becomes a source of divinity and spiritual truth, a sacred temple of God, and a pristine "New World" without humanity's imprints.[11]

Although Emerson's *Nature* has inspired the use of nature for social critique, his insistence on each individual's priority to attain self-improvement is often criticized as "egotheism" under the enormous demand of social reform in his own time.[12] For the

---

[9] As a result, as Angela L. Miller notes, "[those elites] extolled the landscape for what they too often did not find in their daily lives: a realm that transcended social divisions. Landscape appreciation began as an elite social pleasure" (Miller 2007, 241).

[10] As Angela L. Miller points out, "The seemingly untouched quality of the nation's wilderness distinguished the United States from Europe" (Miller 2008, 241).

[11] As Laura Dassow Walls indicates, "The only real guide to truth was that sole realm cleansed of history's impurities and defined not by the treacherous community of human beings but by the exclusion of humanity altogether" (Walls 2003, 5).

[12] According to Philip F. Gura's *American Transcendentalism: A History* (2007), Elizabeth Peabody used

Transcendentalists, nature becomes a significant source for suggesting how cultural things can be reformed. However, Emerson proposes that the higher use of nature reveals it as a kind of mirror of the mind, "a metaphor of the human mind" (*CW* I: 32). Nature exists as a means for the human mind to reach a timeless, transcendental vision of freedom and self-perfection. As Jedediah Purdy states, "Nature's meaning was intuitive; knowing it meant grasping a living, ordered, spontaneous unity that was at once all of reality and, mysteriously, coextensive with one's self. One considered the whole universe to illuminate the self" (Purdy 126). The Emersonian principle of self-reform, from this viewpoint, can be seen as at fundamental odds with the contemporary demand of social reform with respect to slavery and women's rights. Emerson, as Len Gougeon points out, "insists on the need for individuals to redeem themselves first; they should tend to the needs and obligations of their own immediate existence and not be distracted by specious enterprises to impose reform on others" (Gougeon xxii). However, Emerson's priority emphasis on individual self-reform has often compromised the Transcendentalism Movement as a social movement; at least for early Emerson, he is still looking for his proper role between his principle of self-reform and the demand of social reform.[13]

For all of Emerson's essay's celebration of nature, the outcome is a profound paradox between Emerson's view of nature as spiritual source and his anthropocentric emphasis on man itself. In Emerson's *Nature,* there is a radically dualistic split between

---

the word "egotheism" in "characterizing her disappointment in the tendency of much Transcendentalist thought" (Gura 2007, 216).

[13] Emerson, as Philip F. Gura states, "championed the empowered individual, the self-reliant genius for whom conscience was the highest law. But other Transcendentalists lamented how much self-regard obscured the Transcendentalists' response to social problems" (Gura 2007, 215-6).

"me" and "not-me." While both "me" and "not-me" are valued, "me" tends to have a favoring dominance. Although Emerson himself seems torn between ecocentric and egocentric viewpoints in *Nature*, the latter is ultimately so strong that the former is overwhelmed. For Emerson, the human mind is central to the emblem of nature; the purpose of the physical world is to reflect man's spiritual life. As Lawrence Buell states, "When Emerson exhorts scholars to commune with nature and engage in manual labor, his real interest is invigoration of the mind" (Buell 2003, 94). In *Nature*, Emerson's proto-ecological sense of wholeness is often compromised by his human-centered concern. As Emerson writes,

> Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material, but is also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other's hands for the profit of man. The wind sows the seed; the sun evaporates the sea; the wind blows the vapor to the field; the ice, on the other side of the planet, condenses rain on this; the rain feeds the plant; the plant feeds the animal; and thus the endless circulations of the divine charity nourish man. (*CW* I:13)

Whereas Emerson recognizes the proto-ecological significance of the natural process and the interconnectedness of all things in nature, he concludes that nature is intended for "the profit of man."[14] For Emerson, nature, in its independence and wholeness, is not consummated until the human agency of "I" appears at the center of the scene. As Emerson describes in his 1844 "Nature": "The sunset is unlike anything that is underneath it: it wants

[14] In this view, as Max Oelschlaeger points out, Emerson's "conceptual focal point is the human soul and God, not nature or the wilderness. For Emerson a wilderness odyssey is an occasion for the individual mind first to discover a reflection of itself (nature as a system of laws, concepts, and commodities) and then to confirm God's existence" (Oelschlaeger 135).

men. And the beauty of nature must always seem unreal and mocking, until the landscape has human figures, that are as good as itself." (*CW* III: 178). Nature matters only because natural facts are expressions of enduring spiritual revelations for the benefits of man: "we think of nature as an appendix to the soul" (*CW* I: 56). To sum up, Emerson's *Nature* has contributed to the development of American literary environmentalism for its bold attempt to remake the outlook of nature in terms of beauty, divinity, spiritual truth, and moral guidance in the nineteenth-century historical context of rapid industrialization and prevalent utilitarianism in America; nevertheless, *Nature*'s limitation as an environmental text consists in Emerson's anthropocentric insistence on the idea that the purpose of nature is to improve humanity with man as the main focal point.[15]

II. From *Nature* as White Experience to Emerson's View of the Indian

In his *Nature*, Emerson's transcendental vision of nature is constructed as a white space where Emerson can embrace the sublime experience through a mystical union with

[15] In a review essay "Ralph Waldo Emerson" in *American Nature Writers* (1996), Michael P. Branch points out accurately three major reasons why Emerson's reputation does not fare well in the tradition of American nature writing. First, Emerson's view is fundamentally anthropocentric in his *Nature* and other writings. Second, Emerson is more an armchair philosopher of nature than a natural man like Thoreau and Muir. Third, Thoreau, instead of Emerson, is regarded as the true progenitor of the American nature writing tradition (Branch 1996, 302). However, I also agree with Branch's recognition of Emerson's limitation and contribution to the development of American literary environmentalism. As Branch illustrates, "[Emerson's] vision of nature was mediated both by his idealism and by the spiritual imperatives that were the legacy of his religious training and inclinations. Although it is impossible to claim for him the status of an ecocentric literary ecologist, we should not, therefore, underestimate the importance of his place in the lineage of American nature writers. Unlike earlier American writers, Emerson brought the idea of nature to the very center of his literary and philosophical program. Although he is sometimes faulted for his abstraction, it was Emerson who legitimized the aesthetic and spiritual 'uses' of nature, and thus opened the way for the generations of nature writers who followed him" (Branch 1996, 303).

God through nature. With his racial privilege, Emerson is able to move freely in the rural wildland of Concord, a space dispossessed of its original inhabitants long ago. He is also able to appreciate the beauty and tranquility of nature in terms of intellectual discourse and perform imagination without bodily restraints at a time when slaves were forced to toil on the land and the Indians were removed from their homelands. In the historical context of slavery, even in the antebellum New England landscape, the blackness of freed African Americans and fugitive slaves had marked their bodies as visible targets for the dangers of assault and recapture. Only the invisibility of whiteness would guarantee the safety and freedom of one's bodily movement in the rural and wild landscape. Moreover, reading Emerson's imagination of nature as a white experience will shed light on how a particular natural experience is often naturalized as a norm. From this perspective, the idea of "white nature" or "white wilderness" will highlight who constructs and maintains such a pristine image of nature, who benefits and who is excluded from such a space/experience. Therefore, the white experience of nature normalized as universal and available for all the people has concealed inequality among people, their unequal access to the pristine natural environment, their different senses of nature, and their different ways of life by erasing differences and naturalizing that inequality.

Reading Emerson's *Nature* in the context of slavery reveals the fact that Transcendentalism's embrace of romantic sublime in the wilderness with its focus on individual freedom and self-improvement serves as an attempt to construct whiteness's identification with the wildland as an "unpeopled" space, an extra-historical space free from humanity. Moreover, the landscape of wilderness is totally different from the pastoral landscape usually associated with the institution of slavery. As Paul Outka argues, "[t]he trauma of slavery catalyzed the disassociation of whiteness from the pastoral and its new

identification with the extrahistorical, extrapolitical wilderness" (Outka 43).[16] For Emerson, wild nature serves as a sacred place for spiritual regeneration and ahistorical transcendence. As Emerson writes,

> I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear. In the woods too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child. In the woods, is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith. (*CW* I:9-10)

Whereas Emerson is immersed in the sublime experience of "a perfect exhilaration" to the verge of fear in "these plantations of God," slaves live in agony and merge with nature through pain and forced labor in the plantations of white masters. As Solomon Northup describes in his *Twelve Years A Slave* (1853): "Oh! how heavily the weight of slavery pressed upon me then. I must toil day after day, endure abuse and taunts and scoffs, sleep on the hard ground, live on the coarsest fare, and not only this, but live the slave of a blood-seeking wretch, of whom I must stand henceforth in continued fear and dread" (Northup 75). In this view, while Emerson becomes "part or parcel of God" with the "currents of Universal Being" circulating through his body, slaves' bodies are whipped, pierced, and broken. When Emerson uses the metaphor of "master and servant" by saying "master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance" (*CW* I:10), slaves struggle for their lives and

---

[16] As Paul Outka illustrates, "Slavery functioned as a metaphysical toxin in transcendentalist nature writing, always threatening to pollute the supposedly pristine wilderness and the supposedly transparent white identity that produced it and was produced by it, seeping into Emerson's transcendence and, as we will see, even into Thoreau's withdrawal" (Outka 45).

escape for freedom at great risk from the oppression of their masters. Hence, the transcendental experience of nature has naturalized the white privilege through its way of experiencing and imagining a sublime nature.[17]

To walk into wild nature freely requires social status, a certain level of leisure, and freedom of movement that are historically less accessible to racial minorities in the nineteenth-century United States.[18] Emerson's freedom to walk in the rural forest demonstrates his position as a privileged white man in the nineteenth-century United States. As Emerson writes,

> To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and what he touches. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. (*CW* I:7)

For Emerson, rural solitude is necessary for a sublime experience; however, from a slave's

---

[17] As Paul Outka states, "This empowering sublime experience of a natural world outside of race and history – of a grand, wild world that is fundamentally identified with the subject and that the subject identifies with in the sublime moment – is, among other things, an idealized version of what it is like to be white" (Outka 42).

[18] As Kevin DeLuca points out, "The ability of whiteness to be everything and invisible, to be the unquestionable norm, is a major source of its power. In environmental discourse it is the unstated assumption that nature is white nature, that is, wilderness, and that political efforts must be directed toward saving such a nature for all of the humanity, which refers primarily to white, middle- to upper-class people who have the money and leisure time to be tourists, hikers, and bikers" (DeLuca 225).

viewpoint, the countryside is a place of violence and oppression.[19] Moreover, for slaves, to "look at the stars" is far from a transcendental experience but a desperate guidance for escape and survival through the Underground Railroad. While Emerson has the privilege of experiencing "the perpetual presence of the sublime" in the rural wildland, slaves are severely restricted in their mobility by a dominated, slaveholding society. For example, as Solomon Northup writes,

> there is an organization of patrollers, as they are styled, whose business it is to seize and whip any slave they may find wandering from the plantation. They ride on horseback, headed by a captain, armed, and accompanied by dogs. They have the right, either by law, or by general consent, to inflict discretionary chastisement upon a black man caught beyond the boundaries of his master's estate without a pass, and even to shoot him, if he attempts to escape. (Northup 134)

For slaves, it is extremely dangerous to wander "from the plantation" in the rural wildland since the patrollers are ready to "inflict discretionary chastisement" on them. The natural world, therefore, becomes a performative space of whiteness for Emerson to seek and achieve an extra-historical transcendence of freedom and self-perfection.[20]

---

[19] For slaves, as Carolyn Merchant states, "The woods offered food, medicine, refuge"; "But for blacks, forests presented both liberation and terror. Fear of wild beasts, poisonous snakes, and ghosts, as well as the dangers of capture, rape, beatings, and hangings, were not only imagined but real deterrents to the protective mantle of trees and swamps. While wilderness symbolized recreation and renewal for whites, too often it represented oppression and terror for blacks" (Merchant 2007, 76).

[20] I borrow the phrase "a performative space of whiteness" (196) from Bruce Braun's article "'On the Raggedy Edge of Risk': Articulations of Race and Nature After Biology." Braun explores the relationship between "risk culture" and whiteness when he argues that "Nature, then, served as a purification machine, a

The Indian removals of the 1830s were taking place at the same time when Emerson published his *Nature* in 1836 and articulated his belief that the natural world is animated by a spiritual deity called "Oversoul" through which each individual can awaken their inner divinity and perform self-edification. Whereas in his *Nature* Emerson emphasizes the optimistic possibility of each individual's moral potential enlightened through a new outlook of nature for its spiritual insights, the Five Civilized Nations in the southern United States, including the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek (Muscogee), and Seminole, were faced with their forced removal from their ancestral homelands and the destruction of their cultures and communities.[21] When Emerson writes, "In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature" (*CW* I:10), there is an unstated assumption that Emerson can move without any

---

place where people became white, where the racial and hereditary habits of immigrants could be overcome. In short, the journey *into* nature was just as much a journey *away* from something else, and that something else was race" (Braun 197).

[21] Ironically, Andrew Jackson framed the policy of Indian Removal in philanthropic terms. Jackson justified his policy by arguing that removal would guarantee the survival of the tribes, which world otherwise be wiped out by the encroachment of the white civilization. For Jackson, the coexistence was impossible even though the five Native American nations were civilized by adopting the American laws and customs. According to "From Treaties to the Trail" in *Time Magazine* (2017), Jon Meacham describes, "Writing to the Creeks, Jackson explained why he thought removal was essential. 'Friends and Brothers, listen: Where you now are, you and my white children are too near to each other to live in harmony and peace… Beyond the great river Mississippi, where a part of your nation has gone, your father has provided a country large enough for all of you, and he advises you to remove to it,' Jackson wrote. 'There your white brothers will not trouble you; they will have no claim to the land, and you can live upon it, you and all your children, as long as the grass grows or the water runs, in peace and plenty. It will be yours forever'" (Meacham 64).

outward restraints imposed on his body and mind. For the Cherokee and other indigenous peoples, they were facing the tragic fate of eviction and suffering from injuries and deaths through their forced movement enacted by the United States government policy. From this perspective, the rural wildland, for Emerson, serves as a site for man's spiritual growth, while the wilderness becomes burial sites in the "Trail of Tears." As Thurman Wilkins describes in his book *Cherokee Tragedy: The Ridge Family and the Decimation of a People* (1986),

> "One each day," [a full blood] remembered, "and all are gone." They were buried beside the trail, and the company moved forward through the wind and snow; days passed, and there were still more bodies to bury; yet the company always pressed on. "Looks like maybe all be dead before we get to new Indian country," the full blood said, "but always we keep marching on"; and while they marched, their ears were filled with crying and moaning from the wagons that carried the children, the aged, the sick, and the dying. The moaning through days and nights so impressed itself on the Indian's mind that he still seemed to hear it after years had passed, and he would declare: "People sometimes say I look like I never smile, never laugh in lifetime." (Wilkins 327)

For the Cherokees, the wildlands they had passed through in their forced dispossession became stained with their "crying," "moaning," and deaths. Their experiences of nature were marked with their coerced bodily movement and their removal from their ancestral homeland to a remote foreign land. The ancestral homeland they had been removed from would one day become parts of the wilderness preserved in the Great Smoky Mountains

National Park.[22]

In fact, Emerson wrote an indignant letter in 1838 to President Martin Van Buren to protest the forced removal of the Cherokees to the Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River. However, by the time when Emerson published the letter, the Cherokees had been under coerced march.[23] In his letter, Emerson has displayed a command of satire and sarcasm. As Emerson writes,

> It now appears that the government of the United States choose to hold the Cherokees to this sham treaty, and are proceeding to execute the same. Almost the entire Cherokee Nation stand up and say, "This is not our act. Behold us. Here are we. Do not mistake that handful of deserters for us;" and the American President and the Cabinet, the Senate and the House of Representatives, neither hear these men nor see them, and are contracting to put this active nation into carts and boats, and to drag them over mountains and rivers to a wilderness at a vast distance beyond the Mississippi. (*CW* XI:91)

---

[22] The Great Smoky Mountains National Park was established in 1934. Today the national park website recognizes the dark history of forced removal: "The Cherokees were taken from their homes, held in stockades, and forced to move to Oklahoma and Arkansas. Almost 14,000 Cherokees began the trek westward in October of 1838. More than 4,000 died from cold, hunger, and disease during the six-month journey that came to be known as the "Trail of Tears." For further information, please refer to the website: https://www.nps.gov/grsm/learn/historyculture/cherokee.htm.

[23] According to Gay Wilson Allen in his book *Waldo Emerson* (1981), "Emerson mailed this letter not directly to the President but to Massachusetts Congressman John Reed, who arranged for its publication in The National Intelligencer, where it appeared on May 14, and other papers reprinted it. Having fulfilled his promise to write the protest, Emerson felt that he had done all he could – and actually both the President and the land-greedy politicians were deaf to all humanitarian pleas. Books are still being published about the Cherokees' 'trail of tears,' in which hundreds of the Indians, especially women and children, died" (Allen 1981, 315).

Although in this passage Emerson recognizes the treaty as "sham" and protests that the United States government should still execute it, he does not see that the core issue of the conflict with the Indians is actually over land. Emerson, as Jenine Abboushi Dallal points out, "objects not to the seizure of land but to their banishment from civilized society — to the preclusion of Indian assimilation" (Dallal 57). By recognizing the failure of the United States to assimilate the Indians into a civilized society, Emerson protests against the Cherokee removal as a case of injustice.

Emerson is more concerned with the moral character of the United States as a nation. The most significant issues for Emerson is how the United States government's treatment of the Cherokee would affect the honor of the nation and its people. As Emerson writes,

> Such a dereliction of all faith and virtue, such a denial of justice, and such deafness to screams for mercy were never heard of in times of peace and in the dealing of a nation with its own allies and wards, since the earth was made. Sir, does this government think that the people of the United States are become savage and mad? From their mind are the sentiments of love and a good nature wiped clean out? (*CW* XI:92)

By questioning the moral conscience of the government, Emerson begins to frame the controversial issue with respect to the national honor. Emerson tends to understand the issue of Cherokee removal not as a case for the well-being of the Cherokee themselves, but rather as a testing ground of the moral character of the United States as a nation.[24]

---

[24] Emerson's principal concern is how the policy of Indian Removal will hinder the progress of the United States. He is concerned that "the Cherokee removal will make US Americans psychologically, even morally, homeless to the same extent that it makes the Cherokee geographically homeless. Emerson understands the stakes to be very high, a test of his countrymen's moral integrity against the temptations of material greed" (T. Gregory Garvey 466).

Undoubtedly, Emerson is concerned with something unjust done to the Cherokee, but Emerson, as T. Gregory Garvey states, "is even more concerned about how the removal policy will affect his sense of himself as a citizen of the United States" (Garvey 466). In this view, Emerson protests about the forced dispossession of the Cherokee by calling it "a crime that really deprives us as well as the Cherokees of a country?" (*CW* XI:93). His objection to the government policy becomes an act of mourning over the tragedy of losing a country. By reminding the President of the sacred principles on which the United States has been founded, Emerson even implores the President to ponder over the sacred trust of his office: "You, sir, will bring down that renowned chair in which you sit into infamy if your seal is set to this instrument of perfidy; and the name of this nation, hitherto the sweet omen of religion and liberty, will stink to the world" (*CW* XI:93). For Emerson, the "name" of the United States would "sink to the world" if the government should insist on carrying out this "crime." Therefore, with his major focus on the fulfillment of American ideals, Emerson is not so much a defender of the Cherokee and their cause as a guardian of the moral character of the United States and the American people.[25]

---

[25] In fact, during the days when he was composing the letter, Emerson detested himself for his futile attempt to advance a cause that didn't originate within himself. There was a deep conflict in his own psyche. Emerson was compelled to comply with his townspeople's desire to make him the spokesman for their outrage in a meeting in Concord in April 1838. His journal from this crucial month records his bitter feelings and indicates that he had experienced great difficulty establishing a political stance in the Cherokee case. On the nineteenth he grieved: "Then is this disaster of the Cherokees brought to me by a sad friend to blacken my days & nights. I can do nothing. Why shriek? Why strike ineffectual blows?" (*JMN* 5:475). Days later, on the twenty-third, Emerson confessed: "This tragic Cherokee business which we stirred at a meeting in the church yesterday will look to me degrading & injurious do what I can…. I stir in it for the sad reason that no other mortal will move & and if I do not, why it is left undone" (*JMN* 5:477). Finally, on the twenty-sixth, having published the letter, Emerson admitted a sense of powerlessness. As he writes in his journal,

Emerson's view of the Indian has been shaped more by myths and popular stereotypes. Emerson's source of the Cherokee and the removal crisis that takes place in 1837 and 1838 is defined by the reports he had read in newspapers, as in the beginning of the Van Buren letter Emerson uses "rumors" to refer to the news he had heard of. About two years after the Cherokee removal, Emerson had reconciled himself to the fate of the Indians by recording his thoughts in a journal dated Sept. 10th, 1840. As Emerson writes, "It is plain that so inferior a race must perish shortly like the poor Indians. S[arah]. C[larke]. Said, 'the Indians perish because there is no place for them.' That is the very fact of their inferiority. There is always place for the superior" (*JMN* VII: 393). Emerson, after the Trail of Tears, does not speak for the Indians again in his lifelong career. In his various writings, whenever Emerson speaks of the Indian, he assumes their inferiority as core essence. For example, in an essay called "Civilization" (1870), Emerson writes, "The Indians of this country have not learned the white man's work"; "The Indian is gloomy and distressed

---

> Yesterday went the letter to V[an]. B[uren]. a letter hated of me. A deliverance that does not deliver the soul. …I write my journal, I read my lecture with joy – but this stirring in the philanthropic mud, gives me no peace. I will let the republic alone until the republic comes to me.
>
> I fully sympathize, be sure, with the sentiment I write, but I accept it rather from my friends than dictate it. It is not my impulse to say it & therefore my genius deserts me, no muse befriends, no music of thought or of word accompanies. Bah! (Emerson *JMN* 5:479)

"Emerson's final exclamation," as Joshua David Bellin states, "at once dismissive and self-loathing, is eloquent of the mingled guilt and relief that underlay liberal northeasterners' inaction on the Indian question" (Bellin 200). From this viewpoint, Emerson undertook the task of writing a protest letter as a duty he was forced to perform for the satisfaction of his family and fellow townspeople. Emerson, as Len Gougeon suggests, "had not yet determined what role to play in bringing about social reform" (Gougeon xix). For Emerson in his earlier stage, as David M. Robinson points out, "Social reform will be deficient or empty, Emerson believes, unless it is also grounded in human ethical development" (Robinson 2004, 11).

when urged to depart from his habits and traditions. He is overpowered by the gaze of the white, and his eye sinks" (*CW* VII:20). In Emerson's view, the Indians and their cultures are static and stagnant. Before the advance of a superior white civilization, their fate is doomed. In his "Historical Discourse at Concord" (1837), while relating the two-hundred-year history of Concord, Emerson has referred to the King Philip's war during the 1670s as a symbol of the fateful failure of the Indian resistance. As Emerson writes,

> The red man may destroy here and there a straggler, as a wild beast may; he may fire a farm-house, or a village; but the association of the white men and their arts of war give them an overwhelming advantage, and in the first blast of their trumpet we already hear the flourish of victory" (*CW* XI: 59).

In this passage, by associating the Indian with "a wild beast," Emerson suggests that such an inferior race must be defeated and displaced.[26] From this perspective, even though

---

[26] In fact, while Emerson is ambivalent about the imperial project of Manifest Destiny, his true concern is the United States and its people, not the Indians. On the one hand, he seems to take a stand against the imperial expansionism. As Emerson writes in "Speech on Affairs in Kansas" (1856): "*Representative Government* is really misrepresentative; *Union* is a conspiracy against the Northern States which the Northern States are to have the privilege of paying for; the *adding of Cuba and Central America* to the slave marts is *enlarging the area of Freedom*. *Manifest Destiny*, *Democracy*, *Freedom*, fine names for an ugly thing" (*CW* XI:259). For Emerson, the moral character of the nation is more significant than acquisitions of vast land by immoral means. In a journal dated January 1844, Emerson writes against the annexation of Texas,

> The question of the annexation of Texas is one of those which look very differently to the centuries and to the years. It is very certain that the strong British race which have now overrun so much of this continent, must also overrun the tract, & Mexico & Oregon also, and will in the course of ages be of small import by what particular occasions & methods it was done. It is a secular question. It is quite necessary & true to our New England character that we should consider the question in the local & temporary bearings, and resist the annexation with tooth & nail. (*JMN* IX:74)

Considering the annexation of Texas as "a secular question," Emerson is concerned with "methods" rather

Emerson recognizes the indigenous dispossession in Concord as "a disgraceful outrage," Emerson's comment would show his principal concern with the moral character of Concord and its people: "It is the misfortune of Concord to have permitted a disgraceful outrage upon the friendly Indians settled within its limits, in February, 1676, which ended in their forcible expulsion from the town" (*CW* XI:61). Therefore, in contrast to his firm stand against slavery in many of his political writings particularly in the 1850s, Emerson seems to remain silent on the contemporary prejudices and hostilities that had deprived Native Americans of their lives and homelands.[27]

---

than the end. However, like the case of the Cherokee removal, Emerson takes a stand against the annexation of Texas because his principal concern is the moral reputation of the nation. On the other hand, Emerson sounds jingoistic as he envisions the pioneering and expansionist enterprise in "The Young American": "The bountiful continent is ours, state on state, and territory on territory, to the waves of the Pacific sea" (*CW* I:364); "It seems so easy for America to inspire and express the most expansive and humane spirit; new-born, free, healthful, strong, the land of the laborer, of the democrat, of the philanthropist, of the believer, of the saint, she should speak for the human race. It is the country of the Future" (*CW* I:371). Optimistic and enthusiastic, Emerson celebrates the expansive spirit of the American people in the westward movement. Furthermore, Emerson is even anthropocentric when he celebrates man's ultimate domination over nature. As Emerson writes in "Resources,"

> I am benefited by every observation of a victory of man over Nature; by seeing that wisdom is better than strength; by seeing that every healthy and resolute man is an organizer, a method coming into a confusion and drawing order out of it. We are touched and cheered by every such example. We like to see the inexhaustible riches of Nature, and the access of every soul to her magazine. (*CW* VIII: 137-8)

Viewing nature as a warehouse of "inexhaustible riches," Emerson celebrates "a victory of man over nature" triumphantly. Therefore, while Emerson embraces the spirit of American expansionism with his deep belief in the inevitable spread of American institutions like democracy, what he questions and criticizes is not the end but a matter of means.

[27] According Joshua David Bellin in his "Native American Rights" in *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism* (2010), "On the whole, the Transcendentalists' attempts to 'speak for the Indian' were far from praiseworthy. Indeed, leading Transcendentalists were almost entirely silent on Native American

III. Walt Whitman's Imperial Vision of America as "Indian-Free" Land

America is Walt Whitman's poem. In his expansive vision, Whitman imagines America as a vast, boundless continent encompassing all people of differences. Like America itself, Whitman's transcendental "I" contains all and speaks for all. Whitman, as a self-appointed "equalizer of his age and land," moves confidently forward in the role of the imaginative embodiment of America. With his self-conscious gesture to be democratic and inclusive, Whitman breaks down the multicultural heterogeneity of the nation into his "I," a transcendental oneness that celebrates the progress of the nation as a whole repeatedly. However, his globalizing "I," like the nineteenth-century United States' imperial expansionism, keeps channeling the voices of others through his own voice. When Whitman speaks for all, he silences the voices of others. Therefore, I argue that Whitman's transcendental vision of "I" who, like Emerson's "transparent eyeball," sees all and "contains multitudes" is in fact marked with his subjectivity of whiteness. Whitman has mistaken whiteness as transparency when his transcendental "I" performs the white imagination of America as a free and democratic land for all by absorbing conflicts, inequalities, differences, and contradictions into his oneness. As Betsy Erkkila points out, "The paradox of Whitman's poetic democracy is that, at the very moment when he seeks to be most inclusive, universal, and democratic, his poetry becomes most powerful and most powerfully dangerous in silencing and denying the rights, liberties, and differences of others" (Erkkila 1994, 57). Therefore, Whitman's transcendental seeing I/eye sees

---

political, territorial, and religious sovereignty; though major figures such as Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau read widely on Indians, traveled among them, and (in Thoreau's case) harbored a lifelong fascination with them, for neither did admiration lead to advocacy" (Bellin 198).

everything and sees nothing; his sight would not always illuminate a path toward insight but toward transcendental blindness.

By examining Whitman's representations of the Indian in his works, I argue that Whitman envisions America as an "Indian-free" land. Although Whitman proclaims that America is for everybody, he represents the Indian as "a disappearing race" that is removed imaginatively in his works and will leave the continent in a pristine state for a superior race. From this perspective, Whitman's works constitute a textual site wherein U.S. imperialism justifies the displacement of Native Americans. While Whitman's transcendental vison appears to erase differences through his poetics of a unified America, his project is to imagine a white future of America free from its indigenous peoples. Whitman's representations of the Indian further call into question his transcendental vision of equality and universality, and they bring to light the imperialist discursive strategies of removal underlying Whitman's seemingly all-inclusive, democratic rhetoric.

While Whitman had a long-lasting interest in the American Indian, his attitude toward the Indians often shows the common prejudices of his own time. Like many Americans who lived through the long nineteenth century, Whitman never stopped struggling with the "Indian problem." Early Whitman still possesses the democratic humanitarianism that produces his sympathetic images of the Indian. In his 1855 "Preface," by articulating that the "American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the race of races," Whitman writes, "[t]o him enter the essences of the real things and past and present events—of the enormous diversity of temperature and agriculture and mines—the tribes of red aborigines" (*CPCP* 7). As Whitman assumes the role of "the arbiter of the diverse" and "the equalizer of his age and land" (*CPCP* 9) for himself in the early period, the "red aborigines" are regarded as an essential part of "the greatest poem." However,

Whitman is also an expansionist who supports Manifest Destiny and believes that the United States plays a God-ordained role in civilizing the wild continent by extending its territory from sea to sea.[28] Whitman, as Gay Wilson Allen states, "sees the advance of the American frontier as only an episode in the history of the human race, but still a high point in that evolutionary march" (Allen 1980, 125). Used to justify the continental expansion as the triumph of civilization over savagery, the idea of Manifest Destiny had created in the popular imagination the belief that the indigenous inhabitants of the continent were a doomed people. In spite of his early democratic humanitarianism, Whitman's transcendental vision of egalitarianism vanished as his views started to take a conservative turn after the Civil War.[29] In a journal entry dated May 25, 1890, Whitman writes, "Indeed,

---

[28] In *Whitman: The Political Poet* (1989), Betsy Erkkila points out, "In the July 1814 issue of the Democratic Review, John O'Sullivan declared that it was America's 'manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated government entrusted to us.' Dismayed by the speed and disruption of Northern industrial development, Whitman, like O'Sullivan and other nineteenth-century celebrators of the westward expansion, came to see the 'boundless democratic free West' as the ultimate site of America's democratic experiment" (Erkkila 1989, 39). Furthermore, Walter Grünzweig argues that "Whitman was an imperialist poet, as much as he was an expansionist poet" (163). Whitman, as Edward Whitley states, "unabashedly supported Manifest Destiny and made no apologies for his belief that the United States had a central role to play in 'civilizing' the American continent" (Whitley 111).

[29] The Civil War had a great impact on Whitman. Whitman became more conservative and more concerned with the well-being of the Union even at the cost of racial others in his post-Civil-War works. As Ed Folsom points out, "For the final thirty years of his life, Native Americans ceased to be a vital presence in his imaginative life. After the Civil War, Whitman himself increasingly 'spoke an eloquent arrogance' on the behalf of the 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' who would fell the forests and turn the redwoods into American forms. Once the sorrow and the shame were shed, once white anxiety was channeled into cultural activity, Native Americans became mere hindrances to be wiped out" (Folsom 1992, 297).

it is our Indian question repeated – which has interests purely for the Indian, interests then of the whole body of states, leading to the larger results. In the meantime the poor aboriginals, so to call them, suffer, go down, are wiped out" (Traubel VI: 423). In this passage, Whitman views the Indian as a figure with a past, not as a figure with a present and a future. Their fate is to be "wiped out." The "tribes of red aborigines," no longer an indispensable part of "the great psalm of the republic" (*CPCP* 8), have been displaced and removed for the "interests" of the United States.

For Whitman, the Native American as a figure has an intrinsic attraction because it symbolizes a close connection to the land with which much of his poetry endeavors to identify. For much of his career, Whitman claims the title of American bard by means of his poetic vision to absorb the indigeneity of the New World into his poetry of the United States. Whitman's desire to identify with North America's original inhabitants in his early poetry suggests a fundamentally nationalistic impulse for the subjectivity of whiteness to become related to the indigenous land.[30] As Susan Scheckel writes, "by claiming Indians, with their long history and mysterious origins, as part of their own national story, nineteenth-century Americans found a way to ground national identity in the distant, inaccessible, 'immemorial past'" (Scheckel 1998, 8). As Whitman writes in section 39 of "Song of Myself":

> The friendly and flowing savage, who is he?
>
> Is he waiting for civilization, or past it and mastering it?

[30] As Ed Folsom points out, "For Whitman, the Indian was synonymous with authenticity, a raw and unmediated experience of this land, the natural embodiment and expression of the topography" (Folsom 1994, 72).

Is he some Southwesterner rais'd out-doors? is he Kanadian?
Is he from the Mississippi country? Iowa, Oregon, California?
The mountains? prairie-life, bush-life? or sailor from the sea?

Wherever he goes men and women accept and desire him,
They desire he should like them, touch them, speak to them,
stay with them.

Behavior lawless as snow-flakes, words simple as grass,
uncomb'd head, laughter, and naivetè,
Slow-stepping feet, common features, common modes and
emanations,
They descend in new forms from the tips of his fingers,
They are wafted with the odor of his body or breath, they
fly out of the glance of his eyes. (*CPCP* 231)

In the beginning of the poem, when Whitman asks about the identity of this emerging new American figure, he is asking a crucial question about who the rightful owner of America is. From this perspective, Whitman displaces an "indigenous savage" with a new "white aboriginal"[31] who is always waiting for civilization to follow his steps but is at the same

[31] D. H. Lawrence calls Whitman "the first white aboriginal" (182) for his overt nationalism when Whitman tries to identify with the indigenous continent of America. There is a nationalist impulse in Whitman's poetry to embrace the figure of the Native American for his desire to connect with indigenous America and thus become indigenized. In his discussion about Whitman's difficulty in dealing with the presence and disappearance of the Indians, Ed Folsom points out, "Whitman's haunting lines in 'Song of Myself,' capture the cultural ambivalence of a country that was at once destroying and honoring the 'savage,' that was

time always "past" civilization and "mastering it." This new "savage" is "flowing" because his identity remains open and responsive to endlessly changing conditions of the frontier. By projecting those idealized characteristics of brave and independent pioneers onto this new figure, Whitman celebrates this "savage" as a new hero: "Wherever he goes men and women accept and desire him." With his "behavior lawless" and "common features," this new "savage" has left the civilized world to venture into the wilderness, "the Mississippi country" and "Iowa, Oregon, California," all the places where the frontier experience is most active and "the 'Indian problem' was being most vividly acted out" (Folsom 1992, 293). Therefore, in his imaginative project of national identity formation, Whitman's "white aboriginal" is indigenized with the land and becomes a model of the new American by replacing and displacing the former "savage."[32]

Whitman, at least in the early phase of his career, still possesses the spirit of egalitarianism that results in his celebratory portraits of the marriage of a trapper and an Indian girl in the frontier. In section 10 of "Song of Myself," Whitman imagines himself "[a]lone far in the wilds and mountains" and witnessing the marriage of a trapper and an indigenous girl. As Whitman writes,

> I saw the marriage of the trapper in the open air in the far
> west, the bride was a red girl,
> Her father and his friends sat near cross-legged and dumbly
> smoking, they had moccasins to their feet and large

---

denigrating savagery in the Indians while celebrating it in whites" (Folsom 1994, 58-59).

[32] As Jean M. O'Brien states, the Anglo-American settlers undertake an ideological labor to "appropriate the category 'indigenous' away from Indians and for themselves" (O'Brien xxii).

thick blankets hanging from their shoulders,
On a bank lounged the trapper, he was drest mostly in skins,
his luxuriant beard and curls protected his neck, he held
his bride by the hand,
She had long eyelashes, her head was bare, her coarse straight
locks descended upon her voluptuous limbs and reach'd
to her feet. (198-7)

By describing the details about characters' casual activities in the wedding ceremony, Whitman celebrates the marriage as one between two ordinary people. The scene of marriage between a white man and a red girl suggests an egalitarian vision of leveling racial bounds. In Whitman's transcendental vision, the marriage between a white trapper and a red girl in the frontier suggests a symbolic union between the civilized and the savage that will give birth to a new American character. Moreover, by marrying a white trapper with a red girl, Whitman attempts to resolve the dilemma of celebrating both the indigenous people as an equal member of the nation and the imperialist expansion of the United States that aims to appropriate the indigenous land. Although his vision of a free and equal America remains imaginatively idealistic in the historical context of the U.S. westward movement, early Whitman still at least attempts to construct a unity, a transcendental vision of America that is large enough to include racial others.[33]

---

[33] Whitman, as Ed Folsom states, "developed a system that proffered an innocent rationale for the Indians' disappearance"; "the Indian was not killed, he was *absorbed*" (Folsom 1978, 59). Concerning the marriage scene in "Song of Myself," Ed Folsom points out, "the marriage of the Indian girl and the white man suggests that America cannot achieve fulfillment without absorbing the native it displaces, and that the native cannot achieve a fullness of meaning until absorbed into the expanding and inevitable creation of the white man" (Folsom 1992, 294). Moreover, as Betsy Erkkila suggests, "This scene of intermarriage

Whitman sees the Indians through the lens of the romantic idea of noble savage in "An Indian Bureau Reminiscence," an article that records his experience when he had a short tenure as a minor clerk in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. in 1865. Although the job is of brief duration, he had the opportunity of meeting these visiting delegations of different Native American tribes. In his account, Whitman is impressed profoundly by Native Americans in terms of their traits, clothes, decorations, and appearances. As Whitman writers,

> There were Omahas, Poncas, Winnebagoes, Cheyennes, Navahos, Apaches, and many others. Let me give a running account of what I see and hear through one of these conference collections at the Indian Bureau, going back to the present tense. Every head and face is impressive, even artistic; Nature redeems herself out of her crudest recesses. (*CPCP* 1171)

Influenced by the popular idea of noble savage in his time, Whitman romanticizes the Indians he encounters in the Bureau as "children of nature," the best works that Nature has redeemed from "her crudest recesses." For Whitman, they are "the most wonderful proofs of what Nature can produce" (*CPCP* 1170). As the depictive catalogue continues, he writes as if he was describing a beautiful animal on the block:

> they would sit around on the floor, leaning against something, or stand up by the walls, partially wrapt in their blankets. Though some of the young fellows were, as I have said, magnificent and beautiful animals, I think the palm of unique picturesqueness, in body, limb, physiognomy, etc., was borne by the old or elderly chiefs, and the wise men. (*CPCP* 1172)

---

between trapper and Indian girl also endorses the notion, articulated earlier by Jefferson, that Indians would either be assimilated into the white race or disappear" (Erkkila 1994, 63).

By comparing some young Native Americans to "magnificent and beautiful animals" and emphasizing their bodily characteristics repeatedly, Whitman fails to see the human quality in these people. Although Whitman admires the beauty of their appearances, they serve simply as an exhibition of "great aboriginal specimens" for Whitman to "look at" and "study." For Whitman, the Indians are a people with a past: "something very remote, very lofty, arousing comparisons with our own civilized ideals—something that our literature, portrait painting, etc., have never caught, and that will almost certainly never be transmitted to the future, even as a reminiscence" (*CPCP* 1172). As the Indians are disappearing, Whitman laments the passing of "something remote, very lofty" in these men. Therefore, Whitman not only fails to see the suffering and uneasiness in the faces of these delegations but also fails to recognize them as real people who have traveled far to the Capitol to negotiate for their lands, lives, and survival with "their Great Father" (*CPCP* 1170).

In Whitman's time, Native Americans had been displaced and removed, leaving behind themselves place names to which Whitman is so attracted. Whitman's fascination with Indian names signifies his strong desire to identify with the indigenous continent of America, a vacant land dispossessed of its original inhabitants. By the Civil War, most of the tribes in the East had been evicted while others had disappeared altogether. The "vanishing race" left place names for Whitman to envision a transcendental connection between an indigenous past and a white present. In this view, Whitman loves the sounds of Native American languages by celebrating Indian place names.[34] In "Starting from

[34] In *An American Primer*, a collection of Whitman's notes which Horace Traubel printed, Whitman writes, "What name a city has – What name a State, river, sea, mountain, wood, prairie, has – is no indifferent matter. – All aboriginal names sound good. I was asking for something savage and luxuriant, and behold here are the aboriginal names. I see how they are being preserved. They are honest words – they give the true length, breadth, depth. They all fit. Mississippi! – the word winds with chutes – it rolls s stream three

Paumanok," Whitman writes,

> On my way a moment I pause,
> Here for you! and here for America!
> Still the present I raise aloft, still the future of the States I harbinge glad and sublime,
> And for the past I pronounce what the air holds of the red aborigines.
>
> The red aborigines,
> Leaving natural breaths, sounds of rain and winds, calls as of birds and animals in the woods, syllabled to us for names,
> Okonee, Koosa, Ottawa, Monongahela, Sauk, Natchez,
> Chattahoochee, Kaqueta, Oronoco,
> Wabash, Miami, Saginaw, Chippewa, Oshkosh, Walla-Walla,
> Leaving such to the States they melt, they depart, charging the water and the land with names. (*CPCP*186)

The indigenous inhabitants of America, like "birds and animals in the woods," leave no visible marks on the land but simply "natural breaths" and "sounds of rain and winds." With their place in the past, "the red aborigines" melt and depart, leaving place names for "the future of the States." For Whitman, the continent of America, marked with indigenous names, is vacated by its former indigenous residents. While Whitman celebrates Indian

---

thousand miles long. Ohio, Connecticut, Ottawa, Monongahela, all fit" (17-8).

names, he fails not only recognizing the forced displacement of Native Americans behind those place names but also reading the stories and cultural meanings between names and places. Indian names, for Whitman, are most alluring without the presence of the Indian.

As the U.S. imperial expansionism marches into the West, Whitman imagines the Western wilderness as a "virgin land." In his transcendental vision of U.S. continental expansion, Whitman often imagines himself as the representative, an all-encompassing "I" stretching to the north, the south, the east, and the west. However, among these geographical locations, the West plays a special and symbolic role for Whitman. Whitman believes that in the boundless free land in the West lies the American future.[35] From this perspective, Whitman envisions the West as a vast, boundless, "untouched" land available for settlers to fulfill the American ideals of freedom and democracy. In "Starting from Paumanok," Whitman envisions that he is a pioneer leading a simple life in the frontier of "Dakota's woods." Far there in the remote place, he is alone singing for the promising future of a new America: "Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a New World" (*CPCP* 176). Whitman's transcendental "I" sets out to fulfill the ideals in the "New World" of the West, a new land full of possibilities. The "unpeopled" landscape would be soon claimed and populated with "the foremost people." As Whitman describes,

> See, vast trackless spaces,

---

[35] Before the Civil War, Whitman was a supporter of the free-soil ideology. He desired to preserve a free and democratic West as land for the free labor who would not have to compete with the slave labor. In an entry dated July 13, 1846, Whitman writes, "The worst thing about these emigrants, and after they come hither, is, that they do not penetrate immediately into the interior – to the 'far west' if possible – and settle down in an agricultural way. And yet, poor things! There are many of them, perhaps, whose means are all exhausted in their passage. For such, it strikes us, it would be well for some means to be organized, to speed them to the cheap lands of the west" (*The Gathering of the Forces*, Vol. I: 164-5).

As in a dream they change, they swiftly fill,
Countless masses debouch upon them,
They are now cover'd with the foremost people, arts,
institutions, known. (*CPCP* 177)

By emphasizing the West as "vast trackless spaces," Whitman imagines the endlessly and swiftly changing conditions of the frontier environment wherein "countless masses" of settlers are engaged in transforming the wilderness into settlements with various products of "arts" and "institutions." For energetic pioneers, the "vacant" condition of the West is waiting for the seeds of human work to create "fruits" of civilization. As Whitman writes in "Pioneers! O Pioneers!":

We primeval forests felling,
We the rivers stemming, vexing we and piercing deep the
mines within,
We the surface broad surveying, we the virgin soil upheaving,
Pioneers! O pioneers! (*CPCP* 372)

For Whitman, the felling of primeval forests and the stemming of rivers are not issues of environmental destruction but a sign of progress and improvement. The purpose of an empty land is to be humanized and made to produce. As the Western wilderness is being cleared under axe and saw, Whitman sees the pioneers as heroic and self-reliant army "surveying the broad surface" and "upheaving the virgin soul" for the good of mankind. Whitman celebrates the conquest of nature.

For late Whitman, especially after the Civil War, the "red aborigines" are no longer viewed as equal members of a multicultural America as he envisioned in his early poetry.

The Indians become "unwanted others" in Whitman's vision of America.[36] As Whitman states in a note dated Sept 8, 1888: "The nigger, like the Injun, will be eliminated: it is the law of races, history, what-not: always so far inexorable—always to be. Someone proves that a superior grade of rats comes then all the minor rats are cleared out" (Traubel Vol. II: 283).[37] In "Yonnondio" (1884), Whitman uses the Iroquois word "yonnondio" which means "a dirge" to refer to the name of an indigenous figure and to mourn over the passing of him and his people. The poem is intended to "lament for the aborigines." As Whitman writes,

> A song, a poem of itself—the word itself a dirge,
> Amid the wilds, the rocks, the storm and wintry night,
> To me such misty, strange tableaux the syllables calling up;
> Yonnondio—I see, far in the west or north, a limitless
> ravine, with plains and mountains dark,
> I see swarms of stalwart chieftains, medicine-men, and
> warriors,
> As flitting by like clouds of ghosts, they pass and are gone in

[36] In his response to the reports of an Indian massacre of white residents in Minnesota in 1863, Whitman writes, "It was enough to harrow one's soul. The poetical Indian is all lollypop. The real reds of our northern frontiers, of the present day, have propensities, monstrous and treacherous, that make them unfit to be left in white neighborhood. The details of their murders, mutilations, last fall in Minnesota and the violations of women and children, make as bloody and heart-rending an episode as there is in American history" (*Notebooks* II:565).

[37] Under the influence of Darwinism, Whitman interprets the inevitable extinction of the Indian and the African as a result of evolutionary progress. As Ed Folsom points out, "The degradation that he found in modern-day Indians seemed to justify their 'elimination' in the name of evolution and progress" (Folsom 1994, 89).

the twilight, (*CPCP* 626)

In the beginning of the poem, after meditating on the indigenous world "yonnondio" and its romantic associations with nature, Whitman's narrator "I" sees the figure Yonnondio "far in the west or north." The vague distant landscape marked with "plain and mountains dark" suggests that an ominous cloud hangs over these people in the distant past. Yonnondio, with "swarms of stalwart chieftains, medicine-men, and warriors" behind him, depart and vanish "like clouds of ghosts" in the setting sun. Like "swarms" of wild animals, the Indians perish from the landscape as if their disappearance was a natural phenomenon. As Whitman continues,

(Race of the woods, the landscapes free, and the falls!
No picture, poem, statement, passing them to the future:)
Yonnondio! Yonnondio!—unlimn'd they disappear;
To-day gives place, and fades—the cities, farms, factories
fade;
A muffled sonorous sound, a wailing word is borne through
the air for a moment,
Then blank and gone and still, and utterly lost. (*CPCP* 626)

With the disappearance of the Indians in the past, they have given a vast, vacant place for civilizing developments of "cities, farms, factories." As Leadie M. Clark states, "That the Indian was disappearing was regrettable but right, for it was a circumstance that could not be prevented. The Indian was to be allowed no place in the developing society, and his contribution could only be the bequeathal of his past to the conquerors of his land" (Clark 56). In his visionary elegy, Whitman grieves over not so much the passing of the Indians as the loss of their images that no "picture, poem, statement" records and passes them to

the future.

In "Song of the Redwood-Tree" (1874), Whitman imagines that the stoic self-sacrifice of the redwoods in the far West contributes to the progress of mankind and the birth of a new civilization. The "song" is actually a "death chant" of a redwood-tree who sings to celebrate its own race's demise that will make room for "a superber race" to "build a grander future" (*CPCP* 351, 352, 355). In Whitman's vision, the redwood-tree is endowed with the spirit who speaks in the first person in human language and bless the advancing settlers who are destroying the very life of the ancient woods with "the sharp tongues of the axes" (351).[38] As Whitman begins the poem,

> A CALIFORNIA song!
> A prophecy and indirection, a thought impalpable, to breathe,
> as air;
> A chorus of dryads, fading, departing, or hamadryads
> departing;
> A murmuring, fateful, giant voice, out of the earth and sky,
> oice of a mighty dying tree in the Redwood forest dense.
>
> *Farewell, my brethren,*
> *Farewell, O earth and sky, farewell, ye neighboring waters;*
> *My time has ended, my term has come.* (*CPCP* 351)

[38] Whitman sees the axe as a new national symbol of unity and progress. In "The Song of the Broad-Axe," Whitman means to celebrate the axe as "the mighty and friendly emblem of the power of my own race, the newest, largest race" (*CPCP* 338). Cecelia Tichi notes that the axe signifies "a fundamental symbol of life and creation" (Tichi 229).

The poem begins with "A California song," suggesting the key role of California in the realization of the United States as a continental nation that extends its territory from sea to sea. By employing the technique of personification, Whitman frames the poet's voice in roman type and the redwood-tree's voice in italic type.[39] Assuming the position of an observer, Whitman lets the voice of the tree spirit to explain for itself in prophetic terms. From this perspective, the tree's death song is the product of "prophecy and indirection" that have predicted the death of the forest and the birth of a new race. With a chorus of mythological "dryads" and "hamadryads" that inhabit the ancient forest, the dying redwood-tree relates an autobiographical story of its own "untold life" (351) and delivers a farewell address not as a species but as an individual:

> *(For know I bear the soul befitting me, I too have consciousness,*
>
> *identity,*
>
> *And all the rocks and mountains have, and all the earth;)*
>
> *Joys of the life befitting me and brothers mine,*
>
> *Our time, our term has come.* (*CPCP* 352)

While Emerson sees the natural world with a spiritual outlook, Whitman ironically endows the tree with a spiritual quality in order to explain its voluntary death for the utilitarian purpose of providing raw materials and bequeathing the land to the settlers. By occupying a position of privilege to speak for others, Whitman silences the voices of others. As M.

---

[39] By pointing out the problematical technique of personification as "the attribution of human characteristics to nonhuman entities" (48), M. Jimmie Killingsworth states, "It employs a special type of 'indirection' that fascinated Whitman, a version of personification in which nonhuman creatures are made to speak. The delivery alternates between the poet's voice in roman type and the voice from nature in italic type. In 'Redwood-Tree,' the poet ventriloquizes the voice of the great sequoia tree itself, or rather the spirits that inhabit it - dryads and hamadryads" (Killingsworth 2004, 66).

Jimmie Killingsworth points out, "Whitman's tree is an abstraction, a nonbeing, an idea that the poet inhabits in order to justify the ways of humans to nature" (Killingsworth 2002, 19). Therefore, Whitman's transcendental vision turns the environmental destruction of the forest into a natural and peaceful sacrifice as the ancient race is described as willing to "leave the field" for the future of a new American race.

Reading "Song of the Redwood-Tree" in the historical context of Indian Wars and indigenous dispossession is even more disturbing. Published in 1874, at the historical moment when the Western Indian tribes were being destroyed and dispossessed, the poem draws an implicit comparison between the doomed trees and the Native American. The poem also implies Whitman's attitude toward the "Indian Problem" and reflects his imperialist vision of America as an "Indian-free" land, an "unpeopled" land available for a superior white race.[40] In the beginning of the poem, when Whitman uses "death chant" to refer to the song of the tree, it is difficult not to associate the redwood-tree with "red aborigines." Like the stereotypical noble savage of nineteenth-century popular literature who dies singing stoically, Whitman's redwood-tree, ancient and stately, faces death stoically.[41] In addition, the Indian's "red skin" is analogous to the red bark of the redwood-

[40] As Steven Blakemore and Jon Noble state, "While Whitman was writing his poem, the Indian problem in California resonated in the newspapers and journals. Through the 1870s, California tribes took up the famous Ghost Dance. The most publicized California Indian war occurred right before Whitman wrote his poem, in the fall of 1873, when the Modocs, a tribe living in northern California, made national news" (Blakemore and Noble 111).

[41] Roy Harvey Pearce notes that nineteenth-century Americans often considered the eloquence and "death chant" as core characteristics of the Indians: "The formal talk at Indian treaties and the far-fabled death songs of noble savages" (Pearce 78-9). In his poem "Osceola," Whitman describes the final scene when Osceola faces his death stoically: "When his hour for death had come, /He slowly rais'd himself from the bed on the floor /Drew on his war-dress, shirt, leggings, and girdled the belt /around his waist, /Call'd for

tree. From this perspective, in Whitman's vision, the sacrifice of both the redwood-tree and "red aborigines" contributes to "a loftier strain" of the nation (352). As Whitman writes,

> *For them predicted long,*
> *For a superber Race, they too to grandly fill their time,*
> *For them we abdicate, in them ourselves ye forest kings!*
> *In them these skies and airs, these mountain peaks, Shasta,*
> *Nevadas,*
> *These huge, precipitous cliffs, this amplitude, these valleys grand, far*
> *Yosemite,*
> *To be in them absorb'd, assimilated.* (352)

For the greater good of "a superber race" who arrives to people the land, both the redwoods and "red aborigines" are "absorbed" and "assimilated" into the new nation through their voluntary sacrifice. As Steven Blakemore and Jon Noble point out, "this assimilation is Whitman's imperialist fantasy of a nationalistic appropriation of both the Indians and their land in the throes of Manifest Destiny. Whitman resolves the contradictions of the Indian crisis by linguistically appropriating them into the service of the new nation" (Blakemore and Noble 118). Therefore, Whitman's language of "a superior race" and "assimilation" suggests his ideological participation in the imperialist project of Manifest Destiny that aims to invade and expropriate indigenous homelands across the continent of America.

By presenting the fateful demise of the redwoods overtly, Whitman seems to embrace the inevitable extermination of the Indians. As Edward Whitley states, "Like the noble Indians of popular literature who dutifully acknowledged that a new era had dawned

---

vermilion paint (his looking-glass was held before / him,) /Painted half his face and neck, his wrists, and back-hands" (*CPCP* 648).

on the American continent, the redwood trees in Whitman's poem admit that they must yield to the encroachment of white settlers" (Whitley 115). In this view, the original inhabitants of California, like the redwoods, must perish first to create a "virgin land" and "leave the field" for white settlers: "*These virgin lands, Lands of the Western Shore, /To the new Culminating Man, to you, the Empire New, /You, promis'd long, we pledge, we dedicate*" (352). By abdicating and dedicating their lives to a greater cause, the redwoods fulfill the promise of "a prophecy" and leave "[t]hese virgin lands" for "new Culminating Man" to build an "Empire New." Whitman's language echoes the imperialist rhetoric of Manifest Destiny overtly. As Whitman continues,

> *Here climb the vast, pure spaces, unconfined, uncheck'd by wall*
> *or roof,*
> *Here laugh with storm or sun, here joy, here patiently inure,*
> *Here heed himself, unfold himself, (not others' formulas heed)*
> *here fill his time,*
> *To duly fall, to aid, unreck'd at last,*
> *To disappear, to serve*. (*CPCP* 353)

In Whitman's vision, the geographical expansiveness of the Western landscape suggests limitless possibilities for the nation. In order to justify the expropriation of the indigenous land, Whitman creates a mythological resolution to the "Indian Problem" by envisioning that the Indians, like the redwoods, accept their annihilation willingly and choose to fade away.[42] As Eric Cheyfitz states, "Western imperialism, and perhaps this is true of all

[42] As Steven Blakemore and Jon Noble suggest, "A literary ethnic clearing of the Indian problem. Whitman, in effect, rationalizes the disappearance of the Indian by transmuting the red problem into a voluntary sacrifice in which the old race 'yields,' 'abdicates' so that it may serve, pledge, and dedicate itself

imperialisms, founds its program on the disappearance of the 'other'" (Cheyfitz 109). In Whitman's transcendental vision of America, both the redwoods and "red aborigines" have no place in the present and the future.

The removal of the American Indians is connected with the environmental genocide of the redwood forests.[43] With a tone that shows the anthropocentric arrogance of human domination over the non-human world, Whitman optimistically emphasizes the inevitable progress of U.S. imperial expansionism and finally globalization, the ultimate fulfillment of "a prophecy." Whitman catalogues the economic possibilities of the "new" land with confident approvals,

> The fields of Nature long prepared and fallow, the silent,
>
> cyclic chemistry;
>
> The slow and steady ages plodding, the unoccupied surface
>
> ripening the rich ores forming beneath;
>
> At last the New arriving, assuming, taking possession,
>
> A swarming and busy race settling and organizing everywhere,
>
> Ships coming in from the whole round world, and going

---

to the new master race" (Blakemore and Noble 118).

[43] "Song of the Redwood-Tree," as M. Wynn Thomas states, "seems to be a crudely ingenious, or possibly ingenuous, attempt to justify, even to incite, indiscriminate felling" (Thomas 139). In his essay "How Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman Viewed the Frontier," Gay Wilson Allen writes, "I know of no other literary work which so naively reveals the American national consciousness of the nineteenth century - though with most of the people it was probably an unconscious drive. But whether conscious or unconscious, it made the plunder of their natural resources inevitable - and tragic, courting hubris, as we can now see" (Allen 1980, 126). Furthermore, M. Jimmie Killingsworth suggests, "In linking manifest destiny to a view of nature as a boundless resource base for human expansion, the poem can only offend the sensibilities of modern environmentalists" (Killingsworth 2002, 18).

out to the whole world,
To India and China and Australia, and the thousand island
paradises of the Pacific,
Populous cities, the latest inventions, the steamers on the rivers,
the railroads, with many a thrifty farm, with machinery,
And wool, and wheat, and the grape, and diggings of yellow
gold. (*CPCP* 354)

Once "the New arriving" race takes rightful possession of the "unoccupied surface" of the wilderness and improves it with their works of "settling and organizing everywhere," the empty wilderness will be transformed into a productive land scattered with "populous cities" and "many a thrifty farm." The land will produce commercial goods for "the whole world" and yield raw materials for building cities and railroads. For Whitman, the most important issue is "how the land could be made to produce" (Kurant 83). With his faith in technological development and material progress, Whitman sees no conflict between man and nature. All the resources of the wilderness exist only to be accessible for white settlers to "build a grander future" (*CPCP* 355).[44] With the sacrifice of the redwoods and the disappearance of the Indians, Whitman creates a triumphant vision of America for a superior race.[45]

---

[44] As Wendy Kurant suggests, "it is likely that the new territory was sought in the first place because of the imperial power's need for resources. Thus, the imperial gaze turns the captured territory into a commodity and establishes sole ownership of the profits by erasing the competing claims of the prior inhabitants. This commodifying eye is evident in Whitman's 'Song of the Redwood-Tree'…" (Kurant 82).

[45] As W. S. Merwin states, "It makes me extremely uneasy when [Whitman] talks about the American expansion and the feeling of manifest destiny in a voice of wonder. I keep thinking about the buffalo, about the Indians, and about the species that are being rendered extinct. Whitman's momentary, rather sentimental

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined Emerson's *Nature* as an environmental text for its contribution and limitation. Emerson's *Nature* has contributed to the development of American literary environmentalism for its attempt to seek an alternative view of nature as the source of beauty, divinity, spiritual truth, and moral instruction in the nineteenth-century historical context of utilitarianism. However, *Nature*'s limitation as an environmental text consists in Emerson's anthropocentric insistence on the idea that the purpose of nature is to improve the human soul with man at the center of the scene. Reading Emerson's *Nature* in the historical context of slavery and Indian removal reveals that Emerson's transcendental experience of nature is racialized as white experience. Even though Emerson reluctantly writes a letter to President Martin Van Buren to protest against the Cherokee Removal, Emerson is ultimately concerned with the moral character of the nation. By examining Whitman's representations of the Indian in his works, I suggest that Whitman envisions America as an "Indian-free" land. Although Whitman proclaims that America is for everybody, he represents the Indian as "a vanishing race" that will be removed imaginatively and leave the continent in a pristine state for a superior race. For early Whitman, he still possesses the democratic humanitarianism that leads to his compassionate portraits of the Indian. For late Whitman, especially after the Civil War, the "red aborigines" were no longer viewed as equal members of a multicultural America. The Indians become "unwanted others" in Whitman's vision of America. Reading "Song of the Redwood-Tree" in the historical context of Indian Wars and indigenous dispossession in

---

view just wipes these things out as though they were of no importance" (Merwin 321).

postbellum United States further uncovers that both the redwoods and “red aborigines” have no place in the future. By turning forced removal to voluntary sacrifice, Whitman’s poems create a transcendental vision of America for a superior race.

Chapter Three

"It Is Difficult to Conceive of a Region Uninhabited by Man": Romantic Indian and The Myth of Wilderness in Henry David Thoreau's *The Maine Woods* (1864)

But North America was only inhabited by wandering tribes, who took no thought of the natural riches of the soil: and that vast country was still, properly speaking, an empty continent, a desert land awaiting its inhabitants.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835/1840)

Henry David Thoreau, particularly since the twentieth century, has been regarded as a leading figure not only for American environmentalism but also for the tradition of nature writing all around the world.[1] Given Thoreau's profound influence in the development of contemporary discussion about the wilderness, any exploration of nineteenth-century American ideas about the wilderness must examine Henry David Thoreau's philosophy. In Thoreau's life, he made three journeys into the rivers, lakes, forests, and mountains of Maine in 1846, 1853, and 1857. His purpose was to experience the wilderness in its pristine state and observe Native Americans first-hand. His experiences of these three excursions were written into three essays "Ktaadn," "Chesuncook," and "The Allegash and East Branch," all collected and published

[1] Among his many titles, Thoreau has been called "the spokesman for advocates of nature" (Lifton, 67), "the nineteenth century's most influential wilderness philosopher" (Spence 22), "our first and subtlest environmentalist" (Theroux xi), and "the greatest American nature writer and one of the world's best" (Oelschlaeger 170). Lawrence Buell, in his important *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995), reads Thoreau as a cornerstone for understanding the American variant of "literary naturalism" (1995, 10).

posthumously in *The Maine Woods* (1864).[2] Therefore, *The Maine Woods* is Thoreau's only wilderness book and a true "Indian" book he had ever written.[3]

This chapter investigates Thoreau's representations of the Indian and the wilderness. Thoreau sees the Penobscot Indians through the lens of the romantic idea of savagism. While the Indians live in the wild nature, Thoreau rarely recognizes the wilderness as their homeland; instead, Thoreau constructs the myth of the wilderness as empty space for his imperial imagination of "discovery." In doing so, I divide this chapter into three sections. The first section examines Thoreau's idea of romantic Indian. During his three trips, Thoreau encounters his Native American guides and in the latter two, he has personal experiences of traveling with and observing them. From the very beginning, he expects to see the Indians he thinks to be "authentic" and tries to gain knowledge from his Indian guides, Joe Aitteon and Joe Polis. However, Thoreau sees his Penobscot guides through the lens of his preconceptions informed by the romantic idea of savagism which is very

---

[2] "Ktaadn" was first published in installments between July and December of 1848 in *Union Magazine* while "Chesuncook" appeared in James Russel Lowell's *Atlantic Monthly* in 1857. Thoreau was working on the third essay, "The Allegash and East Branch," when he died in 1862.

[3] Throughout his later life, roughly between 1845 and 1861, Thoreau had compiled twelve manuscript volumes with notes and observations on various Native American tribes and their cultures. These notebooks are his "Indian Books," according to Lucy Maddox, "with notes, anecdotes, and transcribed passages from his readings about Indians" (Maddox 133). In her *Henry David Thoreau: A Life* (2017), Laura Dassow Walls points out, "His thousands of pages of notes documented the damnation he saw visited upon Indians by their so-called historians and recorded all he could glean of their lives and customs. Most of his sources were by white authors, since few Native Americans had yet broken into print" (Walls 420). While some critics contend that Thoreau would write an original "Indian book" based on these volumes, Robert F. Sayre argues against such a speculation: "But he did not write it, and a skeptical critic must also recognize that no evidence was so far turned up of his explicitly saying he intended to" (Sayre 103). As a result, *The Maine Woods* is unquestionably "the book about Indians" that Thoreau did write in his life (Sayre 155).

popular and prevalent in the nineteenth-century America: that is, the construction of the American Indian as noble savage living a life of simplicity in harmony with nature, free and uncorrupted from the vices of civilization. Once Thoreau's Indian guides fail to meet his romanticized presumptions, they become "degraded" and thus "doomed to extinction."

The second section focuses on the myth of the wilderness. Throughout his three essays in *The Maine Woods*, Thoreau describes the wilderness as uninhabited space by employing a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside nature. This no-man's land in its original state, in Thoreau's imagination, has been waiting for white men's acts of discovering, mapping and exploring. To imagine America as an empty continent not only erases a long cultural history of Native Americans who have made their homes on the land, but also validates the conquest and appropriation of indigenous homelands by the Euro-American imperialism. The third section examines Thoreau's ambivalent attitude between his criticism of the environmental destruction and his admiration for frontiersmen in the Maine wilderness. While Thoreau is overwhelmed by the frightening nature in "Ktaadn," Thoreau often embraces the wild nature for its integrity and spirituality. However, elsewhere when he travels in the wild landscape, Thoreau seems to feel the wilderness is too wild and desires for the presence of human settlement.[4] Finally, I explore Thoreau's proposal at the end of "Chesuncook" for "national preserves" which interestingly include people and animals. Nevertheless, in spite of literary critics' general approval of Thoreau's statement, I observe that Thoreau's proposition for preserving the wildland and its people in a park for "inspiration and our true recreation" shows his

[4] As Nina Baym states, "Across the range of his writings, Thoreau, consistently inconsistent, constructs and dismantles polarities that are already internally conflicted: untouched nature (sometimes saving, sometimes vile) versus humanized landscape (sometimes salvific, sometimes despoiled)" (1999, 168).

assumption of the indigenous culture as static as well as the construction of the park as a museum or a wild zoo rather than a home.

I. Thoreau's Romantic Indian

Thoreau's interest in Native Americans and their cultures in general is a lifelong endeavor and intellectual pursuit.[5] Because of his fascination with the original inhabitants of North American continent, Thoreau starts his study of the Indian at an early stage and even becomes an ardent relic collector. Laura Dassow Walls, in her most recent *Henry David Thoreau: A Life* (2017), begins her introduction with an anecdote in which young Thoreau brothers played Indian on the riverbank when they were looking for "Indian relics" on one Sunday evening in 1837: after a long day's search, watching the sunset even inspired Henry into "an extravagant eulogy on those savage times" (Walls 3). This episode indicates one crucial point if we intend to understand Thoreau's ideas about the Native American: as the relics or arrowheads belong to "those savage times" in the past, the Indians are already vanishing from the present. Those Indian relics, for Thoreau, become symbols of "originality and primitivism"; for Thoreau, as Eric J. Sundquist states, "'Indian' itself came finally to be almost an empty label for whatever phenomena, artifactual or fantastic, were presently missing from the landscape" (Sundquist 1979, 48). From this perspective, collecting relics serves as a way of imagining and memorializing the Indians as past tense.

---

[5] Robert F. Sayre, in his *Thoreau and the American Indians* (1977), calls Thoreau "the most Indian-like of classic American authors" (ix). For Paul Theroux, Thoreau is "an early and unbigoted chronicler of native Americans" (xi) while Richard Fleck argues that Thoreau is "spiritually closer to an Algonquian than a European" (1985, 7).

The Indian as a race has been disappearing and what they have left is only relics.[6]

Thoreau starts with and never entirely escapes seeing the American Indian through the lens of the romantic idea of savagism. "Any study of Thoreau and American Indians," according to Robert F. Sayre, "must begin with a description of savagism, the nineteenth-century white men's idea of Indian life" (Sayre 3). The romantic idea of savagism provides Thoreau with the primary framework through which he imagines and constructs the Indians as innocent children of nature living a simple life and free from any oppressions of the civilized society.[7] In this view, the Indians are often imagined as living in a mythic state of primitive innocence and savage simplicity.[8] However, because the Indians are perceived as childlike, they are incapable of any kind of development and thus doomed to extinction when faced with the advance of a superior civilization. Moreover, their status as nomadic hunters also exclude them from any right to own the land because only farmers who cultivate and improve the land have the right. From this perspective, in the nineteenth-

---

[6] Studying local histories written between 1820 and 1880 in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, Jean M. O'Brien explores how these narratives launch the myth of Indian extinction in his book *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (2010). As O'Brien states, "The fascination with ruins and relics unearthed throughout the region also became a site for the creation of replacement narratives. Non-Indians frequently paused to consider the stories behind the artifacts they so enthusiastically collected, musing about the peoples they insisted they had replaced" (O'Brien 56).

[7] Roy Harvey Pearce, in his *Savagism and Civilization: A study of the Indian and the American Mind* (1953), has written the intellectual history of the idea of savagism from 1609 to 1851. As Pearce illustrates, "a major western European intellectual and imaginative tradition [was] that of primitivism — the belief that other, simpler societies [were] somehow happier than one's own" (Pearce 136).

[8] "He must live in a small roaming group and survive by hunting," as Roy Harvey Pearce indicates, "so he has little or no sense of property or wealth, little notion of government and civil organization, but has a 'high sense of equality and independence'" (Pearce 87).

century historical context of Indian Removal and Indian Wars, the idea of noble savage has been used to justify the imperial conquest of their cultures and the expropriation of their lands. As we have seen in earlier chapters, only after noble/ignoble savages disappear or are eliminated can their homeland be reinvented as "virgin," an empty land available for white settlers. Therefore, the Indian becomes only an abstraction, a blank screen onto which Euro-American writers project their beliefs, longings, and anxieties.[9]

The image of the vanishing Indian appeals to Thoreau's romantic sentiments. In Thoreau's journals, we can see the mythologized Indian clearly. For example, an entry dated May 9, 1841 shows, "[t]he pine stands in the woods like an Indian – untamed – with a fantastic wildness about it even in the clearings. If an Indian warrior were well painted, with pines in the back ground – he would seem to blend with the trees, and make a harmonious expression (*WJ*, I: 308-9). Thoreau imagines the Indian as not only closer to nature but even part of nature. Another instance is dated April 26, 1841, as Thoreau describes,

> The charm of the Indian to me is that he stands free and unconstrained in Nature, is her inhabitant and not her guest, and wears her easily and gracefully. But the civilized man has the habits of the house. His house is a prison, in which he finds himself pressed and confined, not sheltered and protected. (*J*, I: 253)

Here the Indian is romanticized as the "natural man" who lives in the idealized "Nature" of Thoreau's imagination, free from the oppressive conditions that plague civilized

---

[9] The tradition of savagism, as Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. points out, "did not create the favorable version of the Indian; rather it shaped the vocabulary and the imagery the explorers and settlers used to describe their actual experience in the New World and the lifestyles they observed among its peoples" (Berkhofer 73).

societies. However, the image of the Indian as "child of nature" also underscores the implicit inferiority of the native and thereby validate the Euro-American conquest. In this way, the Indian's fate is doomed, and their extinction is inevitable: "the truest element of savagism was not in its descriptions of the Indians but in its prophecies of their extinction" (Sayre 8). In another entry dated July 16, 1850, Thoreau writes,

> A lone Indian woman without children, accompanied by her dog, wearing the shroud of her race, performing the last offices for her departed race. Not yet absorbed into the elements again; a daughter of the soil; one of the nobility of the land. The white man an imported weed, -- burdock and mullein, which displace the ground-nut. (*J*, II: 42)

In his imagination, Thoreau seems to project the fate of the whole Indian race onto the barren figure of the Indian woman: she has no children so there is no future for the departing race. The woman, wrapped in her burial "shroud," is the last of her race and would be soon "absorbed into the elements again." The indigenous inhabitants of the continent are displaced and replaced by a new race, "an imported weed," as Thoreau describes the white man as invasive foreign plants of "burdock and mullein."

As far as the Cherokee removal is concerned, Thoreau does not openly speak for their struggle against the government policy. On the contrary, he repeats and strengthens the popular stereotype that the Indians condemn themselves by stubbornly refusing to abandon their traditional ways of life as hunters and assimilate into a civilized society as farmers. Writing in the wake of the Trail of Tears, Thoreau observes in his journal,

> For the Indian there is no safety but in the plow. If he would not be pushed into the Pacific, he must seize hold of a plow-tail and let go his bow and arrow, his fish-spear and rifle. This is the only Christianity that will save him.

> His fate says sternly to him, "Forsake the hunter's life and enter into the agricultural, the second, state of man. Root yourselves a little deeper in the soil, if you would continue to be the occupants of the country." But I confess I have so little sympathy with the Indians and hunter men. They seem to me a distinct and equally respectable people, born to wander and to hunt, and not to be inoculated with the twilight civilization of the white man.
>
> […]
>
> A race of hunters can never withstand the inroads of a race of husbandmen. The latter burrow in the night into their country and undermine them; and [even] if the hunter is brave enough to resist, his game is timid and has already fled. The rifle alone would never exterminate it, but the plow is a more fatal weapon; it wins the country inch by inch and holds all it gets.
>
> What detained the Cherokees so long was the 2923 plows which that people possessed; and if they had grasped the handles more firmly, they would never have been driven beyond the Mississippi…. (*J*, I: 444-6)

In Thoreau's view, the Cherokee is an inferior race of hunters who use "bow and arrow" and "fish-spear and rifle" rather than "a plow-tail," a symbol of agriculture and civilization. Because the Cherokees do not "improve" the land with the plow as "a more fatal weapon" like "a race of husbandmen," they are "driven beyond the Mississippi." From this perspective, the plow serves as "a more fatal weapon" for white settlers to invade, occupy, and appropriate indigenous lands. For Thoreau, the Cherokees themselves should be blamed for their failure at adopting agriculture as a way of life. Therefore, Thoreau seems reluctant to acknowledge that the Cherokees become "civilized" by taking up their plows. Thoreau fails to understand the true motivation behind the Indian Removal Act: the white

settlers' greed for gold and land. What Thoreau writes in his journal merely echo the political rhetoric of his day: a superior Anglo-American civilization will replace and displace the inferior savagery represented by the Indians.[10]

In *The Maine Woods*, Thoreau travels into the wilderness and strives to see the real "children of nature" who he thinks still enjoy a rapport with nature. In his view, the American Indians who have a living experience of nature must have a rich store of knowledge for him to learn. They hold the key to his inner search for an understanding of the land. Furthermore, as the Indians are disappearing from the American continent, they represent to Thoreau as the remnant living representatives of the past. In order to better understand an earlier, pre-contact age, Thoreau, like an anthropologist, must hurry to grasp the last chance to write down their knowledge. As Robert F. Sayre states, "Thoreau recognized Indians as people who had spent their lives in Nature and developed a knowledge of it that was superior to white men's. Red men were teachers. They were also custodians of the American past, and Thoreau, in common with others of his time, was eager to uncover their little-known history" (Sayre x). However, as Thoreau's descriptions in *The Maine Woods* show, his encounters with three Penobscot guides challenge his

---

[10] As William Rossi suggests, "it was impossible to imagine Thoreau's writing apart from the categories of 'wild' and 'civilized' that so deeply informed his thinking, so was it virtually impossible for Thoreau himself to think about native peoples outside of the territory these categories defined" (11). Furthermore, in an internet *New Yorker* article "Environmentalism's Racist History," Jedediah Purdy states, "When [Thoreau] wrote about American nature, Thoreau was arguing about American culture, which, even for most abolitionists, meant the culture of a white nation. In his essay 'Walking,' which gave environmentalists the slogan 'In wildness is the preservation of the world,' Thoreau proposed that American greatness arose as 'the farmer displaces the Indian even because he redeems the meadow, and so makes himself stronger and in some respects more natural.' For both Muir and Thoreau, working, consuming, occupying, and admiring American nature was a way for a certain kind of white person to become symbolically native to the continent."

racial/cultural preconceptions with the reality. His experiences express a mixture of some sincere admiration with prejudice and suspicion that he shares with his contemporaries. In the nineteenth-century America, while Thoreau was one of the most knowledgeable writers about Native Americans and their cultures, he still could not escape viewing an Indian not as a symbol.[11]

In the first essay "Ktaadn" in *The Maine Woods*, all the Indians Thoreau encounters have disappointed him profoundly. In his view of the village on Indian Island, Thoreau describes the first Penobscot he meets as "short, shabby, washerwoman-looking" and the houses "weather-stained," with a "shabby, forlorn, and cheerless look" (6). The noble savage Thoreau expects to see is no longer existent. His essay is actually full of condescension: "This picture will do to put before the Indian's history, that is, the history of his extinction. In 1837 there were three hundred and sixty-two souls left of this tribe. The island seemed deserted to-day…." (6). For Thoreau, the Penobscot Indians have lost their "noble" and "wild" lifestyle: "These were once a powerful tribe. Politics are all the rage with them now. I even thought that a row of wigwams, with a dance of powwows, and a prisoner tortured at the stake, would be more respectable than this" (6). Frustrated with what he sees, Thoreau appeals to his romantic imagination of savagism that an absent, pre-contact tribe would be more "authentic" than the present "fallen" one.

Louis Neptune, supposedly Thoreau's native guide in his first excursion to Mt. Ktaadn,[12] fails Thoreau's romantic preconceptions profoundly. In the beginning, Neptune

---

[11] After all, Thoreau "did not study Indians, in all their variety and social relationships; he studied 'the Indian,' the ideal solitary figure that was the white American's symbol of the wilderness and history" (Sayre x).

[12] In *The Maine Woods*, Thoreau spells Katahdin as Ktaadn.

does not show up at the appointed place and time. At the end of the trip, when meeting him again and finding him and his companions indulging in "a drunken frolic," Thoreau erupts with his anger and contempt:

> Met face to face, these Indians in their native woods looked like the sinister and slouching fellows whom you meet picking up strings and paper in the streets of a city. There is, in fact, a remarkable and unexpected resemblance between the degraded savage and the lowest classes in a great city. The one is no more a child of nature than the other. In the progress of degradation the distinction of races is soon lost. (104-5)

In Thoreau's view, the racial boundary becomes blurred between the "degraded savages" living in the woods and those "lowest classes" in the streets of a big city in terms of their moral and spiritual corruption. Thoreau fails to investigate why Louis Neptune and his fellows would choose to engage in such an alcoholic activity.[13] In the conclusion of "Ktaadn," when seeing Louis Neptune and his companions departing for their business, Thoreau evokes the image of the vanishing native,

> He is but dim and misty to me, obscured by the æons that lie between the bark canoe and the batteau. He builds no house of logs, but a wigwam of skins. He eats no hot bread and sweet cake, but musquash and moose meat and the fat of bears. He glides up the Millinocket and is lost to my sight, as a more distant

[13] As Marek Paryz contends, "this is the kind of conviction that arises at the intersection of the prejudices of the colonizer and of the capitalist. His unflattering impressions of the Indians often result from the negative verification of his earlier ideas, in a word – from his disappointment. He went to the woods of Maine with a strong belief that the natives had a particular bond with nature that made them a unique category of humans, and this belief was irreversibly undermined by the Indians who were anything but proud, noble, and honest" (142).

> and misty cloud is seen flitting by behind a nearer, and is lost in space. So he goes about his destiny, the red face of man. (106)

For Thoreau, their "destiny" is doomed and the only appropriate place for "the red face of man" is in the distant past. Neptune and his companions, the "degenerate Indians," without any place in the present society, are only "relics" of a disappearing race. As a result, in "Ktaadn," the only "authentic" Indian is the one that Thoreau creates in his fantasy.

In his second essay "Chesuncook," Thoreau's attitude toward the Indian becomes more ambivalent. At first, Thoreau succeeds in obtaining a Penobscot guide, Joe Aitteon, "a governor's son," and does spend more time with him during their trip. In their first meeting, Thoreau depicts his Indian guide as "a good-looking Indian, twenty-four years old, apparently of unmixed blood, short and stout, with a broad face and reddish complexion, and eyes, methinks, narrower and more turned up at the outer corners than ours, answering to the description of his race" (120). Skilled in woodcraft and handling his canoe, Aitteon also speaks the Penobscot language and is able to give Indian names for places, birds, animals, and wild flowers. Later when Thoreau observes him tracking the moose, Aitteon's bodily movement lives up to Thoreau's expectations: "At another time, when we heard a slight crackling of twigs and he landed to reconnoitre, he stepped lightly and gracefully, stealing through the bushes with the least possible noise, in a way in which no white man does,— as it were, finding a place for his foot each time" (151). It seems that Aitteon is "the Indian" that Thoreau looks for in the Maine wilderness.

In "Chesuncook," the most striking moment that Thoreau feels thrilled with his "romantic Indian" is when he hears a group of Indians chatting in their native language: "It took me by surprise, though I had found so many arrowheads, and convinced me that the Indian was not the invention of historians and poets. It was a purely wild and primitive

American sound, as much as the barking of a chickaree, and I could not understand a syllable of it" (184-5). By juxtaposing the sound of the native language with "the barking of a chickaree," Thoreau endorses the nineteenth-century idea that the primitive people and animals belong to the wild nature. Listening to their conversation without comprehending any meanings further stimulates Thoreau into a fantasy that he has been transported imaginatively back in time to a mythic past. As Thoreau writes,

> These Abenakis gossiped, laughed, and jested, in the language in which Eliot's Indian Bible is written, the language which has been spoken in New England who shall say how long? These were the sounds that issued from the wigwams of this country before Columbus was born; they have not yet died away; and, with remarkably few exceptions, the language of their forefathers is still copious enough for them. I felt that I stood, or rather lay, as near to the primitive man of America, that night, as any of its discoverers ever did. (185)

For Thoreau, this is the "authentic" moment of experiencing the primitiveness that has inspired his romantic imagination. Although Laura Dassow Walls states that "hearing their language had convinced him that Indians were real" (Walls 2017, 339), I suggest that Thoreau still projects his longings onto the sound "unintelligible" to him.[14] Thoreau even imagines himself along with those imperial "discoverers" who discovered "the primitive man of America" and heard the Indian language for the first time in the distant past. In Thoreau's imagination, those were the times when the "authentic" Indians lived. Therefore, the sound just serves as a vehicle for stimulating Thoreau's fantasy about indigenous savagism.

---

[14] From this perspective, I agree with Lucy Maddox's argument that "[w]hat Thoreau discovers is a disembodied and moveable sound, to which he can attach the significance he would like it to have" (155).

During the trip in "Chesuncook," however, Thoreau is disappointed with the Indians generally. First, he is vexed by what he views as Aitteon's hybridization of Indian and civilized traits. Thoreau first finds him behaving like a white man. For example, when they travel down the stream, Thoreau is "surprised to hear him whistling 'O Susanna,'[15] and several other such airs, while his paddle urged us along. Once he said, "Yes, sir-ee. His common word was 'Sartain.'" (144). Aitteon even swore once "about his knife being as dull as a hoe,—an accomplishment which he owed to his intercourse with the whites" (128). Moreover, Thoreau frequently has to reconcile himself with the fact that Joe Aitteon is actually limited as a resource for his learning. When Thoreau asks Aitteon about "how the ribs were fastened to the side rails," Aitteon answers Thoreau, "I don't know, I never noticed" (144). Aitteon even admits to Thoreau about his inability to subsist "wholly on what the woods yielded,— game, fish, berries, etc.,—I suggested that his ancestors did so; but he answered that he had been brought up in such a way that he could not do it" (144). In a camp with a group of the Indians, Thoreau also finds the Indians ignorant of their history when he tells them stories of their tribe's past; as Thoreau continues, "but I found that they knew but little of the history of their race, and could be entertained by stories

---

[15] "O Susanna," or "Oh! Susanna," written by Stephen Foster in 1846, was one of the most popular songs in the nineteenth-century United States. The original song has four stanzas, with its second stanza related to slavery: "I jumped aboard the telegraph and traveled down the river, / Electric fluid magnified, and killed five hundred Nigger." Thoreau mentions Joe Aitteon's singing of "O Susanna" in the context of "Chesuncook" shows he is surprised to find that Aitteon, a "child of nature," should sing a song from the white civilization. For Thoreau, it suggests Aitteon might be degraded by influences of the civilization. However, the killing of "five hundred nigger" in the song lyrics also suggests the system of slavery is connected to the imperial project of indigenous genocide by wars and removals in the nineteenth-century historical context. The romantic idea of noble savage as a "vanishing race" is often expressed through an understanding of slaves as inferior. Both slaves and the Indians are viewed as doomed and should perish.

about their ancestors as readily as any way" (183-4). The Indians, in general, have failed Thoreau's expectation.

In the climactic episode of the "moose killing," Thoreau accuses both white and Indian hunters of exploiting nature by killing moose in a wasteful manner. Originally, he expresses that the intention of his second trip to Maine is "to see a moose near at hand, and was not sorry to learn how the Indian managed to kill one" (133). Nevertheless, after watching Aitteon skinning and butchering the animal, he later evinces his regret over his part in it and even calls it a "tragic business" (156). As Thoreau writes,

> Other white men and Indians who come here are for the most part hunters, whose object is to slay as many moose and other wild animals as possible. But, pray, could not one spend some weeks or years in the solitude of this vast wilderness with other employments than these, — employments perfectly sweet and innocent and ennobling? For one that comes with a pencil to sketch or sing, a thousand come with an axe or rifle. What a coarse and imperfect use Indians and hunters make of nature! No wonder that their race is so soon exterminated. (162)

In this passage, it is important to note that Thoreau's bitter indictment of both white and Indian hunters for their participations in exploitations of nature ends up as an affirmation that only the Indians should shoulder the responsibility and face the consequence of the forthcoming fate of extinction. As Laura L. Mielke states, "[i]rate and self-righteous, Thoreau pushes a condemnation of all hunters to a pronouncement of Indian fate, a metaphysical justification of American Indian genocide" (Mielke 108). In contrast to his idealization of the Indian in general, Thoreau disparages those who demonstrate their capacity for struggle and adaptation to the modern world for survival. In Thoreau's view,

they become "inauthentic," thus degraded, and should face their extermination soon. In conclusion, Joe Aitteon, Thoreau's native guide in his second trip, falls short of his expectation. For Thoreau, Aitteon is just another "fallen" Indian who has lost the "noble" and "pure" qualities of his race by acquiring some corrupting traits of civilization.

The representation of Joe Polis, Thoreau's native guide in his third essay "The Allegash and East Branch," is actually more positive than those of his previous guides. Most literary critics have affirmed Thoreau's detailed "ethnographic" account of Polis as a real person rather than a symbol.[16] However, while I agree that in his third excursion Thoreau has developed a more informed understanding of his Penobscot guide and become more willing to accept his hybridized behaviors and ideas, I suggest that those features about Polis that Thoreau has described are positive because they conform to his presumptions. Indeed, Joe Polis is the most complex figure among all the Indians Thoreau has depicted in his three essays in *The Maine Woods*. In Thoreau's view, Polis retains his cultural traits while adapting to a rapidly changing world. He is a shaman, capable of telling "some medicinal use for every plant" (321). Losing none of his traditional skills like woodcraft or navigation, he is also a Protestant. Emphasizing the importance of education

---

[16] For example, as Robert F. Sayre states, "Thoreau's scrupulous candor in trying to present Polis exactly as he was, without romanticizing him as a savage or playing down his acceptance of civilization. This is as intimate a portrait of another person as Thoreau ever wrote, and it was clearly difficult" (Sayre 184). Robert D. Richardson, Jr., in his *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* (1986), asserts that "Thoreau called his account of this excursion 'The Allegash and East Branch,' but he could equally well have called it 'The Indian,' for it was more about Joe Polis than any other single subject" (Richardson 354). Lawrence Buell, in an introductory essay "Henry David Thoreau" in *American Nature Writers* (1996), calls "The Allegash and East Branch" as "almost an informal monograph on Native American cultural practices based on Thoreau's observation of Polis and enhanced by Thoreau's wide reading in Native American history and ethnography" (Buell 944). Jeffrey Myers even argues that the essay represents "the development of Thoreau's most comprehensive disavowal of ecological and racial hegemony" (Myers 78).

for his tribe, Polis "understood very well both his superiority and his inferiority to the whites" (269). Being one member of the aristocratic class, Polis has long been a significant figure in the Penobscot tribe and even travels to Washington as a representative of his people. Intelligent and clever, Polis is "quick to learn anything in his line" (275). During their trip, Polis demonstrates his ability to provide words to Thoreau from his native language about plants, animals, lakes, and mountains while simultaneously learning English from Thoreau to convey abstract ideas. For Thoreau, Polis is the ideal guide to learn from: "I told him that in this voyage I would tell him all I knew, and he should tell me all he knew, to which he readily agreed" (229). From this perspective, Thoreau has become more sympathetic with Polis's hybridized characteristics and his adaptation to the modern world.

Throughout the essay, Thoreau's many descriptions of Polis fulfill his assumptions about the Indian. In their first meeting, Thoreau describes Polis in positive terms: "He was stoutly built, perhaps a little above the middle height, with a broad face, and, as others said, perfect Indian features and complexion" (215). Moreover, even his house looks satisfactory to Thoreau: "[h]is house was a two-story white one, with blinds, the best-looking that I noticed there, and as good as an average one on a New England village street" (215). When Polis only brings some items with him for the excursion, "beside his axe and gun…a blanket" (217), it shows to Thoreau that Polis has strong skills to survive in the wilderness. During the journey, Thoreau often admires Polis for his abilities in either finding a trail in the forest or managing his canoe skillfully. Polis's "Indian-ness" has impressed Thoreau profoundly: "I could only occasionally perceive his trail in the moss, and yet he did not appear to look down nor hesitate an instant, but led us out exactly to his canoe. This surprised me; for without a compass, or the sight or noise of the river to guide us" (344);

"At such times he would step into the canoe, take up his paddle, and, with an air of mystery, start off, looking far down-stream, and keeping his own counsel, as if absorbing all the intelligence of forest and stream into himself…" (347). As a result, Polis represents everything "authentic" about the Indian in Thoreau's imagination.

In "The Allegash and East Branch," there are two striking examples to show Thoreau's romantic idea of savagism. For Thoreau, Polis represents the idealized noble savage living in intimacy with nature. First, Thoreau is surprised to find out that Polis is able to tell and imitate animal sounds. As Thoreau writes,

> Just before night we saw a musquash (he did not say muskrat), the only one we saw in this voyage, swimming downward on the opposite side of the stream. The Indian, wishing to get one to eat, hushed us, saying, "Stop, me call 'em;" and, sitting flat on the bank, he began to make a curious squeaking, wiry sound with his lips, exerting himself considerably. I was greatly surprised, — thought that I had at last got into the wilderness, and that he was a wild man indeed, to be talking to a musquash! I did not know which of the two was the strangest to me. He seemed suddenly to have quite forsaken humanity, and gone over to the musquash side. (282)

Listening to Polis voicing animal's sounds and "talking to a musquash," Thoreau confirms his expectation that Polis is an "authentic" Indian, a true "child of nature" in the wilderness. Thoreau even fancies that Polis would be transformed into a member of the animal world. As a result, Thoreau affirms this is the true experience of wilderness he is searching for: "I had at last go into the wilderness" because Polis is "a wild man indeed." The second example is when Thoreau hears Polis singing in one night, Thoreau's fantasy transports him back to the moment of "the discovery of America." As Thoreau writes,

> His singing carried me back to the period of the discovery of America, to San Salvador and the Incas, when Europeans first encountered the simple faith of the Indian. There was, indeed, a beautiful simplicity about it; nothing of the dark and savage, only the mild and infantile. The sentiments of humility and reverence chiefly were expressed. (244)

Polis's singing validates Thoreau's quest for originality and simplicity in the Indian as a noble savage who lives in harmony with the wild nature. However, Thoreau's reaction also reflects the nineteenth-century stereotype of the Indian as living in an "infantile" condition as those earlier conquistadors constructed the image of the Native American as "childlike" at the discovery of America and utilized it as an excuse to justify conquest and genocide.

The third essay "The Allegash and East Branch" still reveals Thoreau's prejudice and patronizing attitude toward Polis and his culture. There are two crucial examples. During their travel, when Polis points to Mount Kineo and relates an important creation story from his culture that has been central to their idea of cosmology, Thoreau appears bored, impatient, and dismissive. Here I will quote in length,

> While we were crossing this bay, where Mount Kineo rose dark before us, within two or three miles, the Indian repeated the tradition respecting this mountain's having anciently been a cow moose,—how a mighty Indian hunter, whose name I forget, succeeded in killing this queen of the moose tribe with great difficulty, while her calf was killed somewhere among the islands in Penobscot Bay, and, to his eyes, this mountain had still the form of the moose in a reclining posture, its precipitous side presenting the outline of her head. He told this at some length, though it did not amount to much, and with apparent good faith, and asked us how we supposed the hunter could have

> killed such a mighty moose as that, — how we could do it. Whereupon a man-of-war to fire broadsides into her was suggested, etc. An Indian tells such a story as if he thought it deserved to have a good deal said about it, only he has not got it to say, and so he makes up for the deficiency by a drawling tone, long-windedness, and a dumb wonder which he hopes will be contagious. (235)

Thoreau dismisses such a significant Penobscot creation story as "a dumb wonder," not realizing what he has missed in such a critical moment to learn from his guide about the indigenous culture. Thoreau, as Laura Dassow Walls states, "was utterly deaf to Polis when he spoke in the same mythic register – showing the distance Thoreau had yet to travel in shedding nineteenth-century stereotypes" (2017, 410). From this perspective, Thoreau travels into the wilderness to collect Indian names for places, but he just turns his back to those important stories behind the names, completely ignoring the cultural connections between the Penobscot Indian and their "homeland" as a storied place. The second example follows this episode immediately. After exploring Mt. Kineo and descending the mountain, Thoreau meets Polis and finds him "puffing and panting" (242). Thoreau explains to readers that "superstition had something to do with his fatigue. Perhaps he believed that he was climbing over the back of a tremendous moose. He said that he had never ascended Kineo" (242). Rather than take the chance to learn from the Penobscot creation story, Thoreau ridicules Polis's fatigue after a long day's work by condescendingly dismissing his traditional belief as superstition.

In "Native American Rights" in *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism* (2010), Joshua David Bellin claims that "Thoreau's nose for discarded arrowheads, his vision quest at Waldon Pond, and his travels in the Maine wilderness, where he was guided and befriended by Penobscot Indians, have all been taken as evidence of his deep sympathy

with the first peoples of his native land" (Bellin 203). However, in my reading of *The Maine Woods*, I join other critics who would suggest that Thoreau is often more prejudiced and patronizing than sympathetic. He is able to admire his Penobscot guides for their skills and local knowledge of the wild nature, but he also romanticizes their primitiveness and often disparages their accommodations to the modern world. *The Maine Woods*, as Linda Frost states accurately, "contains Thoreau's most sustained and intimate observations of 'real' Indians, he often chooses to disregard rather than confront the disparity between the Indians he encounters and those whom he had *hoped* to encounter" (Emphasis original, 24). After returning to Concord from his third trip to Maine in 1857, Thoreau writes in a journal entry dated January 23, 1858:

> Who can doubt this essential and innate difference between man and man, when he considers a whole race, like the Indian, inevitably and resignedly passing away in spite of our efforts to Christianize and educate them? Individuals accept their fate and live according to it, as the Indian does. Everybody notices that the Indian retains his habits wonderfully, -- is still the same man that the discoverers found. The fact is, the history of the white man is a history of improvement, that of the red man a history of fixed habits of stagnation. (*J*, X: 251-2)

This passage shows Thoreau's contradiction. While Thoreau looks for an "authentic" Indian who "retains his habits wonderfully" in the Maine wilderness, here he condemns their inability to adapt to the modern world due to their "history of fixed habits of stagnation." For Thoreau, the few Indians still remaining in the East are just residues of a race debased by a long history of contact with the white civilization. Those authentic "noble" Indians lived only in the distant past, when America was still a "virgin land" as imperial

"discoverers" found it. Besides, the Indian is represented as an infantile race that needs "our efforts to Christianize and educate them." However, because of their failure to learn from white man's "history of improvement," their fate is doomed before the advance of a superior civilization.[17]

II. The Myth of the Wilderness

Twentieth-century environmentalists and lovers of nature have long considered that Thoreau, a world-famous philosopher of the wild, must always feel at home in the wilderness. Edward Abbey, in an essay called "Down the River with Henry Thoreau" in his *Down the River* (1991), extols Thoreau's celebration of freedom and wildness by concluding his essay, "[w]herever there are deer and hawks, wherever there is liberty and danger, wherever there is wilderness, wherever there is a living river, Henry Thoreau will find his eternal home" (48). In his three journeys to the Maine forest, Thoreau hopes to see the pristine wilderness not yet encroached by civilized society because he understands well that the march of civilization is inevitable and has altered the landscape rapidly. As Roderick Nash points out, "[Thoreau's] expectations were high because he hoped to find genuine, primeval America" (Nash 2001, 90). Therefore, in this section, I examine how Thoreau perceives and imagines the Maine wilderness. By mainly focusing on the first essay "Ktaadn," I discuss Thoreau's reactions to the "inhuman" landscape on the summit

---

[17] As Jean M. O'Brien points out in *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (2010), "Indians could only be ancients, and refusal to behave as such rendered Indians inauthentic in their minds. Indians, then, can never be modern. These ideas provided fertile ground for the idea of extinction, a mythology that obliterated the fact of Indian survival and fostered the dominant ideology about racial formation in nineteenth-century New England and informed a developing national ideology about Indians" (O'Brien xxii).

of Mt. Katahdin. I suggest that the "Contact" passage shows an important move from Emersonian idealistic anthropocentrism to modern ecological consciousness. In addition, I suggest that Thoreau's romanticizing of a wilderness as untouched and unpeopled, as if he were the first person who discovers or explores the region, reveals his ideological complicity in the project of American imperial expansion.[18] Thoreau's references to those earlier discoverers construct an image of himself as a solitary New World figure exploring the wilderness as an empty landscape. In this way, one of his imaginary missions is to map, chart, and explore the unknown geography as those European imperialists before him. The land must become "vacant" first before it can be discovered, claimed, and improved. The indigenous inhabitants are thus regarded as an absence, an obstacle that has to be removed imaginatively.

During his travel in "Ktaadn," Thoreau has often given an impression repeatedly that he is leaving civilization and entering the wilderness, a country untrodden and uninhabited by man. As Steven Fink states, "Thoreau creates the impression that he is about to leave the last outpost of civilization and enter the virgin wilderness" (171). For example, as Thoreau writes, "[t]here was now no road further, the river being the only highway, and but half a dozen log huts, confined to its banks, to be met with for thirty miles. On either hand, and beyond, was a wholly uninhabited wilderness, stretching to Canada. Neither horse nor cow, nor vehicle of any kind, had ever passed over this ground" (19). Thoreau has consciously marked off the last trace of human habitation and settlement along the

[18] Robert F. Sayre argues that *The Maine Woods* is Thoreau's "western book": "Ever alert to make the most of what was close, he recognized that central Maine in his time was an eastern frontier wilderness. Maine had been a state since 1819, but by the 1840s and 1850s, its population was still confined to its coast. The country he visited, eighty and more miles inland, was too cold and densely forested to attract white settlers" (156). Therefore, in Sayre's view, Thoreau "went northeast to go west!" (156).

route. As another instance shows, "[t]his camp, exactly twenty-nine miles from Mattawamkeag Point by the way we had come, and about one hundred from Bangor by the river, was the last human habitation of any kind in this direction. Beyond, there was no trail, and the river and lakes, by batteaux and canoes, was considered the only practicable route" (45). Interestingly, despite Thoreau's continuous reminders, readers will easily find there is a new human mark immediately following Thoreau's claims. Although Thoreau tries to strengthen the impression of the Maine landscape as pristine, he is simultaneously frustrated by his own preconception: "But it was always startling to discover so plain a trail of civilized man there" (54). Moreover, "Thoreau and his companions," as Frederick C. Lifton suggests, "are about to enter a realm where ordinary experience takes on mythical proportions, and where the usual definitions of dream and reality no longer apply" (Lifton 71). As Thoreau's party moves progressively in space, it appears to him that they have traveled back in time into a pre-contact mythic world.

Thoreau's encounter with the summit of Mt. Katahdin is culturally mediated, replete with literary, classical, Biblical, and mythological allusions. It is also significant to note that, without Louis Neptune or any other Penobscot guide with them, Thoreau's "Ktaadn" is an account of a white man's experience in the wilderness. When Thoreau leaves his companions and ventures out for his first attempt to ascend the summit, he begins to transform his journey into a Miltonic odyssey: "Leaving this at last, I began to work my way, scarcely less arduous than Satan's anciently through Chaos, up the nearest though not the highest peak" (80-1). Evoking the Biblical image from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Thoreau identifies himself with Satan through Chaos in his first glimpse of Eden. Here, the allusion to Satan provides a religious context to affirm Thoreau's heroic ambition while his climbing on the summit of Mt. Ktaadn has become an act of "trespass" into a sacred place.

Thoreau also perceives the harsh natural surrounding as a source of anxiety: "This was the sort of garden I made my way over, for an eighth of a mile, at the risk, it is true, of treading on some of the plants, not seeing any path through it, — certainly the most treacherous and porous country I ever traveled" (81). The next day, when Thoreau leaves his party again to climb alone, he finds the top of Mt. Ktaadn a cold, misty, hostile, and even indifferent place. Feeling shocked by the "Vast, Titanic, inhuman Nature" (85), Thoreau alludes to Greek epic, drama, and mythology: "the mist driving ceaselessly between it and me. It reminded me of the creations of the old epic and dramatic poets, of Atlas, Vulcan, the Cyclops, and Prometheus. Such was Caucasus and the rock where Prometheus was bound. Æschylus had no doubt visited such scenery as this. It was vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits" (85). The top of Mt. Ktaadn, as Thoreau compares to the ancient Caucasus where Prometheus is bound, is thus perceived as a place for no man but only for gods and elements. Thoreau's last allusion is Pomola who, according to the Penobscot tradition, is a bird spirit and god of thunder inhabiting Katahdin: "Simple races, as savages, do not climb mountains, — their tops are sacred and mysterious tracts never visited by them. Pomola is always angry with those who climb to the summit of Ktaadn" (86). All of Thoreau's references present a sense of feeling alienated from the mountain. As Steven Fink points out, "Thoreau's figurative language conveys the heightened tension in his confrontation with this alien landscape: it expresses both the elemental power of this creative force that threatens to overwhelm him and also his resistance to that force through images of human creation…." (Fink 177). Thoreau's words, in my view, demonstrate that any human presence on the summit of Mt. Ktaadn is actually a blasphemy.[19] Thoreau represents Mt.

[19] Thoreau's ascent is interpreted by critics as either a "deeply rebellious Satanic-Promethean one" (Sayre 165) or a "a kind of pilgrimage" (Lifton 72).

Ktaadn as an extra-historical space entirely outside the reach of human beings.

Wild nature overwhelms Thoreau who feels disoriented and thus projects many cultural meanings onto it. Thoreau's experience on the summit of Mt. Ktaadn results in more confusion and contradiction than any expansion of his transcendental vison. When Thoreau and his companions descend from the top of Mt. Ktaadn, they encounter "Burnt Land," a desolate place burned by lightning, where nature is represented as drear, inhuman, and indifferent to humankind and their needs. As Thoreau depicts,

> It is difficult to conceive of a region uninhabited by man. We habitually presume his presence and influence everywhere. And yet we have not seen pure Nature, unless we have seen her thus vast and drear and inhuman, though in the midst of cities. Nature was here something savage and awful, though beautiful. I looked with awe at the ground I trod on, to see what the Powers had made there, the form and fashion and material of their work. This was that Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night. Here was no man's garden, but the unhandseled globe. It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor waste land. It was the fresh and natural surface of the planet Earth, as it was made forever and ever, — to be the dwelling of man, we say, — so Nature made it, and man may use it if he can. Man was not to be associated with it. It was Matter, vast, terrific…. (94)

For Thoreau, the "burnt land" is a no-man's land where "pure Nature" exerts its power to create and shape "the form and fashion and material" of the earth. With a sense of an ongoing creative power of "pure Nature" over its geological time, Thoreau imagines the land as if God was creating it before the presence of humankind. Thoreau's use of "unhandselled" is even more striking. As John Tallmadge illustrates, "To 'handsel'

something is to inaugurate it by means of a gift or a ceremony. To say that the earth was handselled, then, is to say it had been readied for meaningful use and bestowed upon us by its Creator. Conversely, an unhandselled nature would embody no covenant between human beings and God" (Tallmadge 1985, 144). From this perspective, Ktaadn is represented as a void, a new space on earth, untouched and unmarked by any human activities.[20] For Thoreau, if such an inhospitable place is ever intended for any human or nonhuman habitation, it is "for heathenism and superstitious rites, — to be inhabited by men nearer of kin to the rocks and to wild animals than we" (94-5). Ktaadn, in Thoreau's perception, is an alien space for primitive men, not an inhabitable place for civilized men.

Thoreau achieves an epiphany when his sense of radical alienation from an elemental wilderness is transformed into a sudden recognition of the materiality of his own body. Thoreau recognizes the significant connection between the matter of the nonhuman world and the materiality of his body.[21] As Thoreau writes,

> I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one, — that my body might, — but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan that has

---

[20] However, this "unmarked" place is actually the product of a de-historicizing process that renders the land appearing naturally "empty." As Wendy Harding states, "A final form of obliteration associated with the sign of empty is the way it permits places to be lifted out of time and seemingly beyond the preoccupations of humans. With the disappearance, the nonrecognition, or the suppression of the traces of human or nonhuman presence, places become timeless, almost insubstantial and nonexistent. Abstracted from human or nonhuman habitation, they are reduced to their pure physical spatiality" (Harding 14).

[21] This moment, as William W. Stowe states, "is often interpreted as a turning point in Thoreau's intellectual life, at once a trembling recognition of his physical being, and an assertion of his spiritual nature" (Stowe 489).

> possession of me? Talk of mysteries! Think of our life in nature, — daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it, — rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the solid earth! the actual world! the common sense! Contact! Contact! Who are we? where are we? (95)

In this passage, Thoreau presents a critical moment when an Emersonian idealist achieves a transcendental vision by recognizing the materiality of his own body. As Steven Fink claims, "[t]his transference of his sense of alienation from the mountain wilderness to his own body enables Thoreau, not to reconcile this duality of spirit and matter, but to appropriate and internalize the sublime mystery of that duality into his own nature. This is, indeed, not the typically Emersonian moment of transcendence" (Fink 184). Following Fink's insight, I suggest that Thoreau has further transcended the limit of Emersonian idealism to a new form of embodied Transcendentalism. For Thoreau, even Emersonian Transcendentalists have bodies. Therefore, by invoking "Contact! Contact!," Thoreau is asking his readers to acknowledge the materiality that our bodies have shared with the non-human world surrounding us. The health of human bodies and the well-being of nature are closely interconnected and interdependent.[22]

---

[22] I consider that Thoreau's recognition of the materiality of his body and its connection to the matter of the natural world is a pioneering work in American environmental literature. Ecocritics began to pay attention to this field and theorize it recently. For example, Stacy Alaimo, in her *Bodily Natures* (2010), argues that "[i]magining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (2); "thinking across bodies may catalyze the recognition that the environment, which is too often imagined as inert, empty space or as a resource for human use, is, in fact, a world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims, and actions" (2). Moreover, in their "Introduction" to *Material Ecocriticism* (2014), Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann state, "Developing in bodily forms and in discursive formulations, and arising in coevolutionary landscapes of natures and signs, the stories of matter are everywhere: in the air we breathe, the food we eat, in the things and beings of this world, within

For many years, literary critics have debated Thoreau's disturbing confrontation with raw matter on the summit of Mt. Ktaadn.[23] Thoreau's experience on the mountain

---

and beyond the human realm. All matter, in other words, is a 'storied matter.' It is a material 'mesh' of meanings, properties, and processes, in which human and nonhuman players are interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces" (1-2).

[23] On the one hand, does his reactions appear to challenge the Emersonian doctrine of correspondence between the human mind and nature? To use John Tallmadge's words, "[c]an Thoreau find human meaning in a place where nature repels his every advance?" Or, on the other, does Thoreau just experience pure evil or Burkean sublime on the mountain? What can we make sense of Thoreau's representation of the wild nature in The Maine Woods? In fact, many critics have first recognized Thoreau's failure to obtain human meanings from the raw matter of the mountain by means of Transcendentalist method of intuition. For example, as John G. Blair and Augustus Trowbridge states, Thoreau "failed to perceive any analogies between Nature and human life, not from any fault of his own, but because the state of nature there was so primitive as to be devoid of spirit" (Blair and Trowbridge, 509-510). To Roderick Nash, "On the mountain, Transcendental confidence in the symbolic significance of natural objects faltered. Wilderness seemed a more fitting environment for pagan idols than for God" (Nash, 2001, 91). James McIntosh claims, "On the mountain itself, for the first time in Thoreau's work, nature is felt to oppose the wanderer's intuition. The straining attempt to humanize the wilderness suddenly fails; on Katahdin the wilderness presents an irreducibly natural face" (McIntosh 189). According to Don Scheese, "[o]ne of the lessons of the Maine woods is that the human-centered perspective of transcendentalism cannot prevail in all environments" (Scheese 50). In addition, Mark David Spence says, "Thoreau was shocked by the awful indifference that wild nature apparently exhibited toward humans; far from a transcendental encounter, the raw Maine wilderness provided a nightmare" (Spence 21). In response to the negative viewpoint, Ronald Wesley Hoag argues that Thoreau's experience is "a breathtaking apprehension of the sublime." As Hoag continues, "[t]he Katahdin experience comports well with Thoreau's personal brand of transcendentalism, confirming his belief in a nature so full of meaning that one might spend a lifetime seeking – and finding — it, without ever exhausting the supply" (Hoag 33). Although David M. Robinson views Thoreau summit experience as "a denial of vision and a profound challenge to Thoreau's expectations about the interconnection of nature and human perception" (Robinson 134), he affirms that Thoreau's "Contact" episode "leaves the unmistakable impression of a profound and mysterious encounter with the sources of beings" (Robinson 140). The result is "a liberating humility" (139).

also inspires new ecocritical readings from different perspectives.[24] For example, Max Oelschlaeger, in his *The Idea of Wilderness* (1991), argues that Thoreau's "Ktaadn excursion liberated him from transcendentalism" (150). The journey to the top of the mountain, in Oelschlaeger's view, "was an existential encounter that dealt a death blow to the Emersonian notion that the world existed for humankind" (145); therefore, "Ktaadn rekindles for Thoreau a primal or Paleolithic coming-to-consciousness of humankind's naked rootedness in an absolute dependence upon nature" (149). While I agree with Max Oelschlaeger's view that "Ktaadn" reveals "the excesses of transcendentalism" (151), I suggest that in recognizing the "inhuman" quality of nature, an agency independent of human culture, Thoreau has constructed a "no-man's land" in the Maine wilderness. However, Thoreau keeps projecting his imaginations and interpretations onto the blank slate of the landscape. His act, in my view, is an intent to humanize such an alien space. If

---

[24] Robert D. Richardson, Jr. recognizes that "[w]hat Katahdin taught Thoreau is that while man is part of nature, he is not the lord of nature" (Richardson 1986, 181). In his *Nature Writing* (1996), Don Scheese contends, "[i]n the discourse of ecocriticism, [Thoreau] arrives at the biocentric realization that anthropocentrism is misplaced. Contrary to Emerson's belief, nature does not always wear the colors of the spirit" (Scheese 54). In Scheese's reading, Thoreau's difficulty of perception on the mountain symbolizes "nature's unfathomable qualities": "Mystery, not mastery, must be our relation to nature" (Scheese 56). By indicating that Thoreau's "Ktaadn" is "the most misunderstood of Thoreau's writings," Ian Marshall emphasizes the key word most critics ignored is "inhuman": "To see it otherwise is to underestimate both his misanthropic strain and his commitment to the wild. "Inhumanism"…is nonanthropocentrism, the attempt to see the world from some perspective other than human. (Marshall 231). However, has Thoreau been converted from his transcendental homocentric egotism to a new ethic of biocentrism in "Ktaadn"? Jeffrey Myers argues that Thoreau does not reach any solution, "whether a new ecocentricity or an antipathy toward wilderness or anything in between": "The beauty of this moment is that Thoreau resolves nothing on the summit or on the descent. Its importance is as the beginning of a decade-long quest toward ecocentricity, a quest that remains of necessity unfulfilled. But he refuses to resolve it with Emersonian transcendence" (Myers 69).

the pristine wilderness, in Thoreau's view, is so strange and incomprehensible to humans, Thoreau's interpretations of it actually serve as a means to render it "intelligible" and even "habitable." However, Thoreau is far from the first human to do so. Before him, the Penobscot people have dwelled in the region and have shaped the landscape for thousand years. Even "Ktaadn" (or Katahdin in today's spelling), the name of the mountain, is given by the Penobscot, with its meaning of "highest land" or "greatest or preeminent mountain" in the indigenous language (Neff xxiii). In this view, the landscape is never a vacant space as Thoreau perceives it, but a people's homeland, full of human stories inscribed on every corner of the place.[25]

In Thoreau's view, however, the Maine wilderness is still "a bran-new country" (20).[26] In his excursion, Thoreau is struck by the "newness" of the country. Maine even

---

[25] Although, according to John W. Neff, the Native Americans avoid exploring Katahdin itself out of their reverence for the mountain or fear of stirring up the wrath of god, they believe the natural world is full of spirit. As John W. Neff states, "[t]heir reverence grew out of the belief that all of the creation – the natural elements, animals, people – are connected and infused with the same spirit. Katahdin, in their view, is where the earth meets the sky, where the secular and the divine converge; it is the origin of the Great Spirit" (Neff 5). To the Penobscot people, Katahdin is a sacred mountain. Annette Kolodny describes how deeply rooted the Penobscot cosmology is within the Maine landscape. They "experienced their world as everywhere alive with spiritual powers and kin-beings" (2007, 4). In Kolodny's words, their traditional stories generally teach them that "the plants and animals were their helpers and companions, just as the people, in their turn, were to act as kin and companions to the living world around them" (Kolodny 2007, 4-5); as a result, the Penobscot people have developed an ethical and familial relationship with nature: "their ethic of mutual obligation to a land full of spirits, animal-people, and daunting power is fundamentally geographic, every place name helping to orient a traveler in relation to both physical space and spiritual power" (Kolodny 2007, 4-5). Therefore, the Penobscot tradition and their stories have humanized the "wild" landscape where they inhabit and make their homes, a land actually full of "people," "human" stories, and spiritual power.

[26] Here, "bran-new" is Thoreau's original spelling.

becomes a microcosm for America which is "still unsettled and unexplored" (110). The country is "virtually unmapped and unexplored, and there still waves the virgin forest of the New World" (111). Thoreau's fascination with the map, his allusions to earlier explorers of Mt. Ktaadn, and his phrases like "the wild or unsettled portion" (3), "no traces of man" (43), "the forest is uninterrupted" (107), demonstrate his preconception of America as a "virgin land." Like his contemporaries, Thoreau celebrates the pristine beauty of America's continent, thereby associating the seemingly boundless vastness of the wilderness with the promise of America's rich potential for spiritual inspiration and economic development. For example, when Thoreau views a landscape, he sees it in terms of its industrial and economic potentials: "The forest looked like a firm grass sward, and the effect of these lakes in its midst has been well compared, by one who has since visited this same spot, to that of a 'mirror broken into a thousand fragments, and wildly scattered over the grass, reflecting the full blaze of the sun.' It was a large farm for somebody, when cleared" (88-9).[27] For Thoreau, the empty condition of the boundless forest signifies its availability for settlers to improve it and make "a large farm" out of it.

Thoreau further sees himself not as a nineteenth-century tourist but as one of the earlier discoverers and explorers. As Thoreau writes,

> I am reminded by my journey how exceedingly new this country still is. You have only to travel for a few days into the interior and back parts even of many of the old States, to come to that very America which the Northmen, and Cabot,

[27] For those twentieth-first-century readers who have been familiar with the historical image of Thoreau as a pioneering proto-environmentalist, they would be quite surprised to find a different Thoreau in *The Maine Woods*. In my reading, I suggest Thoreau views the landscape not from a proto-ecological perspective but from a land surveyor's vision. According to Patrick Chura, "Thoreau worked seriously at surveying for about thirteen of his forty-four years" (Chura 16).

> and Gosnold, and Smith, and Raleigh visited. If Columbus was the first to discover the islands, Americus Vespucius and Cabot, and the Puritans, and we their descendants, have discovered only the shores of America. (109)

As a self-appointed discoverer, Thoreau resumes the unfinished mission of earlier imperialist discoverers to fill the blank space on map and undertake the difficult task in exploring "the interior and back parts" of America's continent because for Thoreau America is still "exceedingly new." From this perspective, the myth of "discovery" and its relevant conceptualizations of the indigenous land as "virgin," "pristine," or "empty" are all parts of what Mary Louise Pratt terms "anti-conquest." As Mary Louise Pratt illustrates,

> The term 'anti-conquest' was chosen because, as I argue, in modern travel and exploration writing these strategies of innocence were constructed in relation to older imperial rhetorics of conquest associated with the absolutist era. The main protagonist of the anti-conquest is a figure I sometimes call the 'seeing-man,' an admittedly unfriendly label for the white male subject of European landscape discourse – he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess. (Pratt 9)

In other words, "anti-conquest" is a strategy of representation in which a white male subject attempts to secure his innocence while performing imperial imagination and hegemony. Therefore, in Thoreau's gaze, America is still as new and unknown as the New World "discovered" by imperialists for the very first time hundred years ago. Indulging in his fantasy of the myth of the "first sight," Thoreau is engaged unaware and imaginatively in the project of imperial expansion and nation-building.[28]

---

[28] "The story of 'discovery,'" as Joy Porter states, "always discounted the long history of indigenous knowledge and possession of land" (16).

Although Thoreau does not support the imperial project of American westward expansionism publicly, I suggest that his urge to discover and explore a "new" America as well as his longing for the imposition of civilizing developments on the "empty" wilderness reveal his ideological complicity with the popular idea of Manifest Destiny.[29] In Thoreau's view, the mission of rapid continental expansion is not yet completed: "We have advanced by leaps to the Pacific, and left many a lesser Oregon and California unexplored behind us. Though the railroad and the telegraph have been established on the shores of Maine, the Indian still looks out from her interior mountains over all these to the sea" (111). Acquiring the vast land is merely a prerequisite for the work of mapping, exploring, surveying, and developing it. Like many of his contemporaries, Thoreau also sees the wilderness as a wasteland, a space to be redeemed by human toil and improved by human civilization. For

---

[29] Here I agree with Marek Paryz's argument, "The fact that Thoreau was inevitably exposed to the ideology of expansionism and that his work reflects its impact on his way of thinking does not mean that he supported the political solutions propagated by ideology" (Paryz 150). Nevertheless, it is important to note that Thoreau's "Ktaadn" was published in *The Union Magazine* in 1848, a new magazine with its middle-class readership and its nationalist mission. Please refer to Steven Fink's *Prophet in the Marketplace: Thoreau's Development as a Professional Writer* (1992). Thoreau writes "Ktaadn" in a combined form very popular in the nineteenth century: travelogue, adventure story, exploration narrative. As Marek Paryz states, "Thoreau employs the narrative form that had played a significant role in the historical development of the colonial discourse in general and which functioned as one of the literary means of expressing American imperial aspirations" (Paryz 124). Although Mary Louise Pratt writes in the European context, her insights can shed light on the nineteenth-century America as well. As Pratt points out, "…how travel books written by Europeans about non-European parts of the world created the imperial order for Europeans 'at home' and gave them their place in it. I ask how travel writing made imperial expansion meaningful and desirable to the citizenries of the imperial countries, even though the material benefits of empire accrued mainly to the few. Travel books, I argue, gave European reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized. Travel books were very popular. They created a sense of curiosity, excitement, adventure, and even moral fervor about European expansionism" (Pratt 3).

instance, as Thoreau writes,

> No face welcomed us but the fine fantastic sprays of free and happy evergreen trees, waving one above another in their ancient home. At first the red clouds hung over the western shore as gorgeously as if over a city, and the lake lay open to the light with even a civilized aspect, as if expecting trade and commerce, and towns and villas. (46-7)

For Thoreau, the boundless wild nature shows its possibility and potential for human developments "as if expecting trade and commerce, and towns and villas." America as a new continent awaits and invites the seeds of human civilization.[30]

Thoreau projects his fantasy of a "virgin" wilderness onto the Maine woods. The empty landscape and the "noble savage" who inhabits it are both the creations of Thoreau's imagination. In order to remake the landscape as "virgin" and fulfill his vision of "first contact," Thoreau has to free the land from its present and former inhabitants. Hence, as Wendy Harding puts it, "The places designated as empty are in reality culturally distinctive sites full of human and nonhuman, cultural and natural traces; however, these traces have been ignored or effaced. Emptiness is always the product of human decisions" (Harding 10-11). Thoreau rarely recognizes that the wilderness he has strived to see is only the product of his imagination. The wilderness, like a blank space on map, is actually filled with projections of his longings. Nevertheless, the wilderness is full of indigenous stories

---

[30] As Mary Louise Pratt states, "The European improving eye produces subsistence habitats as 'empty' landscapes, meaningful only in terms of a capitalist future and of their potential for producing a marketable surplus. From the point of view of their inhabitants, of course, these same spaces are lived as intensely humanized, saturated with local history and meaning, where plants, creatures, and geographical formations have names, uses, symbolic functions, histories, places in indigenous knowledge formations" (Pratt 60).

and aboriginal presence.[31]

III. Thoreau's Ambivalence and A Proposal for "National Preserves"

Throughout the three essays in *The Maine Woods*, Thoreau is ambivalent in his attitudes toward wilderness and civilization. He embraces nature for its integrity, but he also desires development and settlement. Thoreau "both welcomes and mourns signs of human presence" (Finley 338). He is oscillating between appreciating nature for its beauty and confronting nature as evil, between the spiritual value of nature as the source of inspiration and the utilitarian view of nature as merely natural resources, and between preserving nature and subjugating nature. He is indignant at the exploitation of nature by loggers, but he also often admires those frontiersmen for their self-reliance and skills for survival in the wilderness.[32]

In *The Maine Woods*, man is at first depicted as the destructive evil: settlers, loggers, and hunters. In "Ktaadn," the wilderness has been littered with man's debris and defiled by human activities. When Thoreau arrives in Maine, he soon observes, "The mission of men there seems to be, like so many busy demons, to drive the forest all out of the country, from very solitary beaver swamp and mountain-side, as soon as possible" (4). Instead of calling them "busy bees," Thoreau converts "their industriousness from a virtue to a vice" (Fink 162). Thoreau becomes even bitter with anger when he sees the wasteful exploitation of nature as merely expendable resources:

---

[31] Even the "new" country that Thoreau sees has been already marked for economic purposes: "Lumbering had been going on for over two hundred years before Thoreau's first excursion into the region" (Papa 219).

[32] As David M. Robinson states, "Thoreau's dual allegiance to nature and civilization has been built into the narrative from the beginning" (132).

> The trees lay at full length, four or five feet deep, and crossing each other in all directions, all black as charcoal, but perfectly sound within, still good for fuel or for timber; soon they would be cut into lengths and burnt again. Here were thousands of cords, enough to keep the poor of Boston and New York amply warm for a winter, which only cumbered the ground and were in the settler's way. And the whole of that solid and interminable forest is doomed to be gradually devoured thus by fire, like shavings, and no man be warmed by it. (20-1)

Thoreau laments the squandering of the natural resources that he still considers useful for fuel or timber, "enough to keep the poor of Boston and New York amply warm for a winter." He condemns the wasteful manner of frontiersmen who exploit nature as if natural resources were inexhaustible.

The Maine wilderness, nevertheless, is never a repository of inexhaustible resources. In his second essay "Chesuncook," Thoreau accuses the hunters of their heedless slaughter of the moose:

> This afternoon's experience suggested to me how base or coarse are the motives which commonly carry men into the wilderness. The explorers and lumberers generally are all hirelings, paid so much a day for their labor, and as such they have no more love for wild nature than wood-sawyers have for forests. Other white men and Indians who come here are for the most part hunters, whose object is to slay as many moose and other wild animals as possible. (161-2)

Thoreau mourns that the reckless killing of the moose will finally and inevitably contribute to its extinction. For Thoreau, hunters and lumberers, without "love for wild nature," see

only the commodity value of nature. Consequently, Thoreau even predicts the fate of the Maine wilderness: “But Maine, perhaps, will soon be where Massachusetts is. A good part of her territory is already as bare and commonplace as much of our neighborhood, and her villages generally are not so well shaded as ours” (208). In Thoreau’s view, Maine, with its forests cleared and destroyed heedlessly, would soon become another Massachusetts, a state with its typical domesticated landscape as a result of a long history of human developments.

The careless treatment of natural resources in the Maine frontier has shocked Thoreau. In his third essay “The Allegash and East Branch,” Thoreau criticizes those loggers who see and admire trees only for its size and economic utility. As Thoreau writes,

> The character of the logger's admiration is betrayed by his very mode of expressing it. If he told all that was in his mind, he would say, it was so big that I cut it down and then a yoke of oxen could stand on its stump. He admires the log, the carcass or corpse, more than the tree. Why, my dear sir, the tree might have stood on its own stump, and a great deal more comfortably and firmly than a yoke of oxen can, if you had not cut it down. What right have you to celebrate the virtues of the man you murdered? (313-4)

In Thoreau’s view, the loggers appreciate nature as a warehouse of raw materials: a tree is valuable only in terms of log and timber, the “corpse” of a tree. Furthermore, by comparing cutting down a tree to “murdering a person,” Thoreau becomes furious about the way how the wild nature is subdued and destroyed thoughtlessly. He indicts those loggers of their way of seeing nature and their lack of recognition for the spiritual value of the trees: “The Anglo-American can indeed cut down, and grub up all this waving forest, and make a stump speech, and vote for Buchanan on its ruins, but he cannot converse with the spirit of

the tree he fells, he cannot read the poetry and mythology which retire as he advances" (314). In his biting irony, Thoreau criticizes his fellow Americans for their arrogance and short-sightedness when they cut down the forest and "make a stump speech." Thoreau further condemns the loggers with sarcasm by associating them with those supporters of James Buchanan, a Democrat President who upheld slavery. For Thoreau, the loggers see only the commercial value of nature without any room for spiritual or moral improvement.

Thoreau, on the other hand, idealizes and admires the frontiersmen as heroic pioneers for their endurance, independence, and woodcraft skills in the wilderness. After Louis Neptune fails to show up, Thoreau and his companion hire two white frontiersmen, George McCauslin and Thomas Fowler, as their guides to Mt. Katahdin. Thoreau first praises McCauslin for his "dry wit and shrewdness, and a general intelligence which I had not looked for in the back woods" (28). Then he appreciates Fowler for his courtesy when he drinks "a draught of beer," "a lumberer's drink, which would acclimate and naturalize a man at once" (35). From this perspective, both McCauslin and Fowler serve for Thoreau as idealized woodsmen whose free and self-reliant life represents an interdependent relationship between wilderness and civilization. However, from the very beginning, Thoreau projects the qualities of "noble savage" onto them. As a result, interestingly and ironically, the frontiersmen become the "Indians" Thoreau has strived to see in the Maine forest.

In Thoreau's view, these pioneers are the true agents of self-sufficiency and progress, transforming the wilderness into the civilization. During the journey, Thoreau provides detailed descriptions of those frontiersmen's houses, the kinds of food and drink

available, and even their reading materials on their shelf.[33] Thoreau admires their houses because they are the product of their unimaginable efforts they have made against all odds in rugged nature. In "The Allegash and East Branch," Thoreau writes,

> How much more respectable also is the life of the solitary pioneer or settler in these, or any woods, — having real difficulties, not of his own creation, drawing his subsistence directly from nature, — than that of the helpless multitudes in the towns who depend on gratifying the extremely artificial wants of society and are thrown out of employment by hard times! (334)

Thoreau admires these frontiersmen for their self-reliance in the frontier because of their capability and skills in drawing "subsistence directly from nature." In "Ktaadn," despite his anger at those who cut down trees wastefully, Thoreau often speaks with appreciation for their guides' skillful performance in the wild nature: "We were lucky to have exchanged our Indians, whom we did not know, for these men, who, together with Tom's brother, were reputed the best boatmen on the river, and were at once indispensable pilots and pleasant companions" (41). Therefore, in his first journey, Thoreau often lauds the frontiersmen for their ability to navigate dangerous natural surroundings with calm and self-control.

Having witnessed the environmental degradation throughout his three excursions into the Maine wilderness, Thoreau expresses not only his rage, but he also provides his thoughts about developing a proper relationship with nature. In "Chesuncook," after seeing the bloody skinning of the moose, Thoreau regrets his participation in it and feels the

---

[33] For example, in a logger's camp, Thoreau finds "Emerson's Address on West India Emancipation" (44). In the context of Thoreau's trip in the Maine wilderness, I think Thoreau's mention of Emerson's book is to emphasize his admiration for the frontiersmen with respect to their quests for self-improvement and intellectual life.

"tragedy" has "affected the innocence" and "destroyed the pleasure of my adventure" (160). Although he observes that the Native American hunters make good use of every part of the moose, he is still indignant at the killing of the moose just for pleasure. As Thoreau writes, "But this hunting of the moose merely for the satisfaction of killing him, — not even for the sake of his hide, — without making any extraordinary exertion or running any risk yourself, is too much like going out by night to some wood-side pasture and shooting your neighbor's horses" (161). By comparing hunting the moose for pleasure to "shooting your neighbor's horses," Thoreau condemns this kind of heedless killing as "the murder of the moose" (163). He laments, "[w]hat a coarse and imperfect use Indians and hunters make of nature!" (162). From this perspective, Thoreau reveals his vision of an ideal life in nature: "I think that I could spend a year in the woods, fishing and hunting just enough to sustain myself, with satisfaction" (160). What Thoreau yearns for is a life of simplicity and self-reliance in nature by taking only what he needs without doing any harm to the natural world.

Thoreau appreciates the beauty of living beings in nature, the integrity of a life as it is, not for the sake of any human value. This viewpoint shows what Thoreau calls for "a higher use" of nature. As Thoreau writes,

> Strange that so few ever come to the woods to see how the pine lives and grows and spires, lifting its evergreen arms to the light, — to see its perfect success; but most are content to behold it in the shape of many broad boards brought to market, and deem that its true success! But the pine is no more lumber than man is, and to be made into boards and houses is no more its true and highest use than the truest use of a man is to be cut down and made into manure. There is a higher law affecting our relation to pines as well as to men. A pine cut down, a dead pine, is no more a pine than a dead human carcass is a

> man. …Every creature is better alive than dead, men and moose and pine trees, and he who understands it aright will rather preserve its life than destroy it. (163-4)[34]

For Thoreau, to appreciate "how the pine lives and grows and spires" is more spiritually meaningful than to behold the tree as timber for its commercial value in the market. By comparing "a dead pine" to "a dead human carcass," Thoreau recognizes the importance of every creature as a living entity with its value. In contrast to most of his contemporaries who see nature merely for its utilitarian value, Thoreau endows nature with a spiritual quality and respects all the lives in nature. For Thoreau, the person to make the best use of nature is "the poet." When he is frustrated by the Indians who fail his romantic expectation of "noble savage," Thoreau turns to and idealizes "the poet" as the representative who lives closer to nature and loves nature on nature's own terms without diminishing it: "it is the poet; he it is who makes the truest use of the pine"; "No, it is the poet, who loves them as his own shadow in the air, and lets them stand" (164). The poet appreciates "the living spirit of the tree" rather than "the spirit of turpentine" (165). In Thoreau's vision, the poet will not do any harm to nature but live a life of simplicity by taking only what he needs from nature: "The poet's, commonly, is not a logger's path, but a woodman's" (211). The poet, for Thoreau, is the representative who holds a non-exploitative view of nature and lives in spiritual harmony with nature.[35]

---

[34] By focusing on Thoreau's comparing cutting down the tree for lumber with cutting down the man for manure, Jeffrey Myers argues that "Thoreau implicitly links the commodification of nature with the commodification of human beings, and thereby slavery with environmental destruction" (74). Thus, Thoreau "espouses an ecological worldview that has a social justice statement within it" (74).

[35] Thoreau also encourages the poet to seek the beauty in the wild nature: "not only for strength, but for

While the wilderness invigorates the poet, Thoreau tries to balance the virtues of nature and culture. As Roderick Nash states, "Instead of coming out of the woods with a deepened appreciation of the wilds, Thoreau felt a greater respect for civilization and realized the necessity of balance" (2001, 91). For example, at the end of their journey in "Chesuncook," Thoreau writes, "Nevertheless, it was a relief to get back to our smooth but still varied landscape. For a permanent residence, it seemed to me that there could be no comparison between this and the wilderness, necessary as the latter is for a resource and a background, the raw material of all our civilization" (210-211). The domestic setting of the settlement has a soothing effect on Thoreau.[36] Admittedly, Thoreau appreciates a middle landscape where culture and nature are intertwined. As Thoreau writes,

> The wilderness is simple, almost to barrenness. The partially cultivated country it is which chiefly has inspired, and will continue to inspire, the strains of poets, such as compose the mass of any literature. Our woods are sylvan, and their inhabitants woodmen and rustics; that is *selvaggia*, and the inhabitants are *salvages*. (211)

The wilderness, for Thoreau, is the opposite of civilization, and it is no home for civilized men. Rather, it is the domesticated world of Concord, "the partially cultivated country," and its pastoral environment that are best suitable and appropriate for human habitation

---

beauty, the poet must, from time to time, travel the logger's path and the Indian's trail, to drink at some new and more bracing fountain of the Muses, far in the recesses of the wilderness" (212).

[36] As Richard Bridgman points out, "Thoreau's feelings of insecurity in the backwoods may help to explain why, whenever he came to a settlement, no matter how small, his language always posited an urban growth to come"; "Tedious, complacent, materialistic as it might be, the domesticity of a town had protective features attractive to Thoreau" (217).

and thus most appealing to Thoreau.

Thoreau's Maine wilderness is home for the Penobscot Indians. During his travels, Thoreau's yearning for the sign of human presence and settlement can be attributed to his sense of alienation from the wild nature. In spite of his quest for the "poet's path" in the wilderness, the forest is not yet as domesticated as his home in Concord. In "The Allegash and East Branch," Joe Polis, Thoreau's native guide, is at home in the wilderness because of his deep familiarity with the landscape inscribed with indigenous stories and legends. He knows everything clearly, can easily find a way in the woods, and makes good use of materials at hand for his needs. As Thoreau observes, "he had hunted there from a boy, and knew all about that region" (251). Regarding which route to take in the woods, Polis "does not carry things in his head, nor remember the route exactly, like a white man, but relies on himself at the moment" (253). When Thoreau asks him how "he guided himself in the woods," Polis answers, "Oh, I can't tell you." "Great difference between me and white man" (253). At some moment, Thoreau seems to recognize the wilderness as Polis's home: "This was one of his homes. I saw where he had sometimes stretched his moose-hides on the opposite or sunny north side of the river, where there was a narrow meadow" (273). While exhilarated with finding the "phosphorescent wood" one night and acquiring its Indian name "Artoosoqu" from Polis, Thoreau meditates, "Nature must have made a thousand revelations to them which are still secrets to us" (247). Nevertheless, Thoreau's recognition does not last long. At the end of "The Allegash and East Branch," when asking whether Polis is happy to get home again, Thoreau interprets Polis's reply in a condescending way: "As we drew near to Oldtown I asked Polis if he was not glad to get home again; but there was no relenting to his wildness, and he said, 'It makes no difference to me where I am.' Such is the Indian's pretense always" (406). For Thoreau, the wilderness is only a place to

hunt or travel, not a home to live and stay.

In *The Maine Woods*, distressed by the rapid and wasteful destruction of the wild nature, Thoreau calls for the establishment of "national preserves" to protect nature, a proposal that would anticipate the national park movement after the Civil War. As Laura Dassow Walls states, Thoreau's "vision of national commons would help to inspire America's unique system of national parks and forest and wilderness reserves" (2017, 422). In Thoreau's view, "national preserves," unlike the English counterpart, "prevail no forest laws but those of nature. The aborigines have never been dispossessed, nor nature disforested. (104). Thoreau's "national preserves" provide a home for "the moose, the bear, the caribou, the wolf, the beaver, and the Indian" (108). At the end of his second essay "Chesuncook," Thoreau illustrates his idea in more details,

> Why should not we, who have renounced the king's authority, have our national preserves, where no villages need be destroyed, in which the bear and panther, and some even of the hunter race, may still exist, and not be "civilized off the face of the earth," — our forests, not to hold the king's game merely, but to hold and preserve the king himself also, the lord of creation, — not for idle sport or food, but for inspiration and our own true recreation? (212-3)

In contrast to the English counterpart of preserving game by destroying villages, Thoreau proposes the creation of "national preserves" for preserving animals and protecting "the hunter race" from being civilized. Thoreau's idea expresses an important interest in preserving nature in its entire richness, including animals, plants, and the indigenous people who live in it.[37]

---

[37] Don Scheese suggests, Thoreau's "pleas for preservation also include American Indians, to whom he devoted many years of study and whom he saw as victims of America's modernization and expansion"

The key problems of Thoreau's idea for "national preserves" consist in his assumption of indigenous culture as static and his idea of the preserve's purpose "for inspiration and our own true recreation." As Native Americans were generally considered a race inferior and doomed to extinction in the nineteenth century, some Americans, like George Catlin, a noted painter of the American West, began to express interest in preserving their vanishing customs, clothes, traditions, and languages in a "nation's park". Likewise, Thoreau's proposal for protecting the "disappearing" Indians from being civilized, I suggest, is more like building up an outdoor "museum" whose purpose is to protect artifacts or "endangered species" for the "inspiration" and "recreation" of urban, educated, upper-middle-class whites. However, Thoreau ignores the indigenous culture as dynamic and the indigenous people's struggle to adapt themselves to a rapidly changing world. More significantly, in the historical context of nineteenth-century America, as Native Americans in general were displaced, dispossessed, and removed to a new set of barren lands called the reservation system after a series of Indian wars, it is difficult not to associate Thoreau's proto-environmental proposal with the imperial project of genocide by cordoning off the abject others in large concentration-camp-like places.[38] As a result,

---

(Scheese 24). Jeffrey Myers holds a similar view that "Thoreau sees the destruction of the natural world and the genocide of American Indians as part of the same crime"; therefore, such "national preserves" can serve as "inhabited landscapes where Native American peoples and lifeways will persist" (Myers 77). In her recent biography of Thoreau, Laura Dassow Walls states, Thoreau "called for 'national preserves' to protect our 'national domains' – which, in his vision, included its indigenous people, whose right to continue living on their land would thus be protected as well" (Walls 2017, 341).

[38] As Paul Gilmore points out, "Such a preserve seems at first to invoke the reservation system beginning to be implemented in the late 1840s and early 1850s" (208).

Thoreau's calling for "national preserves" is to preserve the wilderness as a park instead of a home.[39]

IV. Conclusion

In his three journeys to the Maine forest, Thoreau's romanticizing of the Indians as "noble savages" and his mythologizing of the wilderness as empty land make it difficult for him to have a true understanding of both. He sees the Maine Indians and wild nature through the lens of his preconceptions and prejudices of his time. Thoreau seldom questions or confronts the disparity between the Indians he desires to see and those who he has encountered in reality. His observations of the Indians only strengthen his romantic idea of savagism and his conviction about the inevitability of their demise. Moreover, Thoreau relies on the culture/nature duality to highlight the otherworldliness of wild nature as uninhabited land, an empty continent awaiting the imperialist project of discovery, possession, and economic development. Thoreau's representation of the wilderness, as James A. Papa, Jr. states, "owes more to his imagination than to any objective observation of what he found there" (217). Throughout *The Maine Woods*, Thoreau is in fact oscillating between wilderness and civilization. The domesticated space of pastoral Concord, rather than the wilderness of the Maine woods, is Thoreau's true home. His representation of the wilderness as an alien and inhospitable space overlooks the fact that the Penobscot people have inhabited the forest for thousand years. What Thoreau sees as "vacant" space is actually inscribed with history and human stories. Although Thoreau makes a pioneering

---

[39] Thoreau's idea of "national preserves," as Bob Pepperman Taylor suggests, "is to protect the wild frontier as a park rather than as a home. A truly wild nature is a place to visit, not a place to live" (Taylor 41).

proposal for protecting nature and its indigenous people in “national preserves,” I suggest that he ignores the dynamic culture of the indigenous people and their ability to adapt to the modern world. To “freeze” them and their culture in a museum-like “preserve” for the inspiration and recreation of supposedly educated whites turns the wilderness into a park rather than a home. In conclusion, reading *The Maine Woods* still provokes us to rethink over the relationship between humans and the non-human world, particularly about the wilderness discourse, not because Thoreau has reached a solution for us, but rather because his work opens up more questions.

Chapter Four

"I Was Startled by a Human Track": Natural Theology, Sublime, and the Politics of Wilderness in John Muir's Sierra Nevada Writings

There can be nothing in the world more beautiful than the Yosemite, the groves of the giant sequoias and redwoods…and our people should see to it that they are preserved for their children and their children's children forever, with their majestic beauty all unmarred.

President Theodore Roosevelt (1905)

Yosemite Valley, to me, is always a sunrise, a glitter of green and golden wonder in a vast edifice of stone and space.

Ansel Adams (1948)

Yosemite is one of the most famous landscapes in the world, and it is usually pictured as a virgin wilderness. Literally pictured: In most of the photographs that have made the place familiar to the world, there are no people.

Rebecca Solnit, *Savage Dreams* (1994)

This chapter endeavors to examine John Muir's Sierra Nevada writings like *The Mountains of California* (1894), *Our National Parks* (1901), *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911), and *Yosemite* (1912). The main focus is *My First Summer in the Sierra*, in which Muir resurrects his journal of the 1869 sojourn in Yosemite. In his writings, John Muir embraces a Transcendentalist vision that perceives no boundary between himself and the landscape around him. He even moves beyond Emersonian Transcendentalism toward a new biocentric ethic of nature. Moreover, Muir also invents a language of mystical ecstasy and employs religious imagery in distinguishing Yosemite as a sacred place worth preservation. Celebrated for his great contributions to the late nineteenth-century American environmental movement and particularly the establishment of Yosemite National Park,

John Muir is often called "the father of the national park system" today. An immigrant from Scotland, Muir grew up in rural Wisconsin. When he decided to abandon his formal studies in 1863, Muir observed that he had left the University of Wisconsin to enter the "University of the Wilderness."[1] Later Muir wandered to Yosemite for the first time in 1869, and since that first encounter, he had been held in Yosemite's spell for nearly fifty years. Yosemite became his lifelong career, and from today's perspective, his legacy as well. Yosemite nurtured, matured, and nourished him physically, spiritually, and intellectually. It stimulated him to speak for the wilderness in terms of its aesthetic and spiritual values, and to commit himself to saving what remains of the wilderness in the western United States. Muir became "one of America's most eloquent and influential literary voices on behalf of the aesthetic and spiritual value of nature" (Branch 2004, 140). A founder of the Sierra Club in 1892, Muir helped create a lobby for the wild nature and its protection through his nature writings and political activism. In an era of environmental exploitation tempered only by the conservation movement for its utilitarian management, Muir not only proposed an independent, non-utilitarian rationale for preserving the wilderness and thus helped define the preservationist wing of American environmentalism, but he was also involved personally in the creation of Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks. In the history of American environmentalism, as Roderick Nash states, "[a]s a publicizer of the American wilderness Muir had no equal" (2001, 123).

In this chapter, by first examining Muir's contribution for a pioneering biocentric

[1] As Muir writes at the end of "The Story of My Boyhood and Youth," "From the top of a hill on the north side of Lake Mendota I gained a last wistful, lingering view of the beautiful University grounds and buildings where I had spent so many hungry and happy and hopeful days. There with streaming eyes I bade my blessed Alma Mater farewell. But I was only leaving one University for another, the Wisconsin University for the University of the Wilderness" (*SMBY* 111).

outlook of nature in his natural theology, I suggest that his environmental vision can be complicated and enriched if we pay close attention to his white privilege in the construction of a sublime wilderness, his representation of the Indian, and the politics of wilderness. On the one hand, his experience of the sublime is in fact racially marked, a privileged white man's experience naturalized as universal for everybody. He disparages those who have to work in the mountains and those who do not have the same aesthetic response to the beautiful and sublime. On the other, Muir's representation of the Indian further discloses the issue of racism in the early development of American environmentalism. Such sublime and pristine landscape of Yosemite that Muir celebrates in his various writings is not natural as a given, but in fact the political consequence of a long history of violence and dispossession.[2]

I divide this chapter into three sections. In the first section, in order to better understand Muir's vision of nature, I explore what I call Muir's natural theology. By rejecting his father's strict doctrine of Calvinism with its emphasis on original sin and its anthropocentric view of nature, Muir develops his vision of nature by combining Emersonian Transcendentalism with Christianity, and even makes a bold move toward a biocentric ethic of nature. In the second section, I focus on the intersection between the idea of sublime and the formation of white wilderness. By examining Edmund Burke's and Immanuel Kant's works, I interrogate a core question: what role does the ahistorical ecstasy of the sublime play in the cultural construction of this normative white wilderness where racial, classed, gendered others are excluded? In the third section, I investigate Muir's attitudes toward Native Americans and the politics of wilderness. Muir's experience of "so

[2] Rebecca Solnit's *Savage Dreams* and William Cronon's "The Trouble with Wilderness" have proved very helpful and influential in my reading of Muir's Sierra Nevada writings.

glorious a display of pure wildness" ignores the fact that Native Americans have shaped Yosemite for thousand years. Muir's cherished sublime wilderness of Yosemite, far from a pristine nature, is in fact enshrined on a landscape depopulated by a history of violence, dispossession, and genocide. Environmental historians, as Karl Jacoby indicates, have cautioned against "treating nature or wilderness as self-evident categories rather than a reflection of American dreams, fantasies, and anxieties" (Jacoby 22). Therefore, my deconstruction of Muir's "Godful wilderness," based on Rebecca Solnit's insights in her *Savage Dreams* (1994), is not to devalue Yosemite for its aesthetic, spiritual, or ecological significance, but, in my view, to uncover a storied wilderness that will better enrich our understanding of the interdependent relationship between humans and nature and of how humans have used, altered, and inhabited the natural environment as homelands.

I. Muir's Natural Theology

John Muir's vision of nature incorporates spiritual and religious sources available to him and he integrates them into his own natural theology. Muir grew up in an immigrant family with a strong religious background. Although he eventually broke away with his father's dogmatic Calvinism, he stored up a repository of Christian knowledge and spiritual language in his childhood. As John Gatta points out, "The religious disposition evident in Muir's adult response to the nonhuman world derived largely from his family history and temperament" (12). Later, through his friendship with Jeanne Carr, wife of one of his university professors, Muir began his exposure to Transcendentalism from different sources, including his reading of Emerson and Thoreau, meeting with Emerson himself in Yosemite in 1871, and briefly corresponding with Emerson. Moreover, his reading of British romantic poets, like Robert Burns, provides a romantic sensibility for his view of

nature. Through his extensive readings of figures like Alexander von Humboldt and Louis Agassiz, Muir developed his holistic view of the world. All of these influences nurtured Muir's development as a nature writer and philosopher of wilderness to envision a more dynamic, benevolent, and immanent deity in the presence of nature. In this section, I focus on his rejection of his father's Calvinism, his exposure to Emersonian Transcendentalism, his Christian vision of nature, and his further move beyond anthropocentrism toward a biocentric view of nature.

Muir rebelled against his father's Calvinist theology with its emphasis on original sin and perception of God as a wrathful transcendent entity. Regarding his father Daniel Muir's religious discipline and his harsh treatment of his children, John Muir has vivid descriptions in his *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (1913). For example, as a child, Muir was made to study the Bible every day: "father made me learn so many Bible verses every day that by the time I was eleven years of age I had about three fourths of the Old Testament and all of the New by heart and by sore flesh. I could recite the New Testament from the beginning of Matthew to the end of Revelation without a single stop" (*SMBY* 36). In addition to the unpleasant harshness of his father's physical discipline, there was spiritual discipline emphasizing the burning of those sinners in hell. As Muir writers, "Into that fire all bad boys, with sinners of every sort who disobey God, will be cast as we are casting branches into this brush fire, and although suffering so much, their sufferings will never, never end, because neither the fire nor the sinners can die" (*SMBY* 49). In a conversation with a neighbor called George Mair about "the Indian question as to the rightful ownership of the soil," Daniel Muir replied,

> it could never have been the intention of God to allow Indians to rove and hunt over so fertile a country and hold it forever in unproductive wildness, while

> Scotch and Irish and English farmers could put it to so much better use. Where an Indian required thousands of acres for his family, these acres in the hands of industrious, God-fearing farmers would support ten or a hundred times more people in a far worthier manner, while at the same time helping to spread the gospel. (*SMBY* 91)

Daniel Muir's view echoed the popular idea that only those who "improve" the land had the right to own the land in the nineteenth-century America. However, John observed how farmers are "trying to get rich" at the cost of nature. In the eye of those farmers, the land was merely a repository of natural resources for the use and even exploitation of humans. In reaction to his father's faith, Muir would look for religious alternatives in his life.

Throughout his life, Muir read and reread the works of Emerson and Thoreau for their spiritual insights into nature. Sometimes described as "a belated American Transcendentalist" (McKusick 173), Muir received inspirations from Emerson and Thoreau to see nature in terms of not its utilitarian value but its spiritual effects on human mind. For John Muir, as Roderick Nash states, "Transcendentalism was always the essential philosophy for interpreting the value of wilderness" (Nash 2001, 125). In fact, John Muir was exposed to New England Transcendentalism at least as early as his Madison years in the early 1860s through Prof. Ezra Slocum Carr and his wife Mrs. Jeanne Carr.[3] In a passage reminiscent of Emerson's famous essay *Nature* (1836), which evokes the

---

[3] As Michael P. Branch states, "In Madison, Muir was introduced to transcendentalist literature by James Davie Butler and Ezra Carr, and by Carr's wife, Jeanne, a personal friend of Emerson's who would later become Muir's most intimate correspondent" (1999, 101). However, according to Linnie Marsh Wolfe, "it appears that he didn't read *Walden* or the majority of Emerson's essays and poems until his Yosemite period" (79).

metaphor of a "transparent eyeball,"[4] Muir imagines human bodies turning transparent and receptive to the beauty of nature everywhere:

> We come to the edge of the great coniferous forest, made up mostly of yellow pine with just a few sugar pines. We are now in the mountains and they are in us, kindling enthusiasm, making every nerve quiver, filling every pore and cell of us. Our flesh-and-bone tabernacle seems transparent as glass to the beauty about us, as if truly an inseparable part of it, thrilling with the air and trees, streams and rocks, in the waves of the sun, -- a part of all nature, neither old nor young, sick nor well, but immortal. (*MFS* 20-21)

For Muir, the boundary between "me" and "not-me" collapses while the "me" and "not-me" are inter-penetrated intimately. In spite of its pantheistic tone, Muir consistently attributes nature's works to a higher spiritual source. Like Emerson and Thoreau before him, Muir often wanders alone and receives spiritual lessons in nature. As John C. Elder claims, "Muir certainly perpetuates the teaching of Emerson and Thoreau that solitude in nature is the state most conducive to genuine enlightenment" (Elder 376). In this view, Muir is indeed the belated follower of Emerson and Thoreau.[5]

---

[4] According to Michael P. Branch, Emerson's metaphor of "a transparent eyeball" has served for Muir as an inspiration for decentering the romantic self. With Emerson's "I am nothing; I see all," the "transparent self," in Branch's view, "might well describe Muir's ideal literary persona, and his narrative style might be characterized as one of self-effacement — an attempt to erase the obstructive presence of self in the interest of opening the view of nature" (1999, 108).

[5] Muir had been familiar with Emerson's ideas when he wrote *My First Summer in the Sierra* from the old journals he kept in 1869. Hence, as Arlen J. Hansen illustrates, "Muir's copy of Emerson's Essays, now in the Beinecke Library at Yale, is well-marked, indexed, and smudged with pine pitch and Sierra soil, indicating that Muir carried it with him during his years in the Yosemite" (166). According to Stephen Fox, Muir had "littered the margins of his copy of Emerson's essays with dissenting arguments. Emerson and the

Thoreau's influence on Muir is even more obvious, primarily because both of them share their passions for natural history studies and solitary experiential immersion in wild nature. In his *John Muir and His Legacy* (1981), Stephen Fox states that Muir "had finally read *Walden* for the first time in 1872, after a friend in Boston sent her personal copy to him" (Fox 82). However, as Michael P. Branch indicates, "Muir may have read 'Walking' and *Walden* as early as 1862, and he had certainly read *Walden*, *Excursions*, and *The Maine Woods* by 1870"; "It was not until 1907 that Muir purchased and read (apparently cover to cover) the twenty-volume Riverside edition of Thoreau's works" (Branch 1999, 105). A passage from an entry dated July 11, 1890 shows clearly Thoreau's influence on Muir through his essay "Walking" (1861). As Muir writes, "In God's wildness lies the hope of the world – the great fresh unblighted, unredeemed wilderness. The galling harness of civilization drops off, and the wounds heal ere we are aware" (*JM*, 317). Muir has paraphrased Thoreau's "In wildness is the preservation of the world" into his own "In God's wildness lies the hope of the world." Both Thoreau and Muir also share another common penchant to chastise their readers for their short-sightedness or blindness while at the same time striving to persuade them into a "higher use" of nature. More significantly, both Thoreau and Muir are practitioners or doers rather than armchair philosophers. Therefore, Muir's true kindred spirit is Thoreau.[6]

---

early Thoreau both appreciated nature from a base in abstract metaphysics. To Muir this seemed to reverse a proper, more reverent approach" (83). Muir's vision of nature will move beyond Emerson's and Thoreau's idealistic Transcendentalism with its emphasis on nature as a mirror of human mind toward an intrinsic value of nature independent of any allegorical projections of human mind. As Fox states, "evidently Emerson and Thoreau only corroborated ideas that Muir had already worked out independently" (82).

[6] In his many writings, Muir presents himself as a literary and spiritual descendant of Emerson and

Whereas Muir was inspired by New England Transcendentalism in terms of the spiritual insights in Emerson's and Thoreau's works, Muir would ultimately transcend Emersonian-Transcendental anthropocentrism toward a more biocentric ethic of nature. As Robert L. Dorman points out, Muir's "acceptance of Transcendentalist doctrines, however, was selective, delimited by Christian naturalism. Muir cannot be seen (as some interpretations have had it) as merely a lesser and latter-day Transcendentalist disciple of Emerson and Thoreau…" (Dorman 116). Like Thoreau, Muir diverges from Emerson in imagining a new environmental ethic that will challenge human-centered claims.[7] Muir's critique of Emerson lies in his underlying concern that Emerson moved from a self-decentering position in the "transparent eyeball" passage toward an anthropocentric view of nature as a storage of spiritual resources for human beings. Muir, as James McKusick argues, "was in fundamental accord with Emerson's lifelong quest to redeem the American landscape from a merely utilitarian conception of its possibilities. But Muir detects a latent ethic of anthropocentrism lurking in certain passages of Emerson's essay" (McKusick 184). For Muir, nature exists for its own sake: "Winter blows the fog out of our heads. Nature is

---

Thoreau. When he visited their gravesites at Concord's Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in 1893, he showed great respect for the two men. As Muir writes to his wife, "Went through lovely, ferny, flowery woods and meadows to the hill cemetery and laid flowers on Thoreau's and Emerson's graves. I think it is the most beautiful graveyard I ever saw"; "I did not imagine I would be so moved at sight of the resting-places of these grand men as I found I was, and I could not help thinking how glad I would be to feel sure that I would also rest there" (Badè II: 266-7).

[7] As Michael P. Cohen contends, although a transcendental tradition "flowed from Emerson to Thoreau and Muir, neither of the younger men were strict followers of Emerson. If the self they began to discover was suggested in Emerson's essays, both men found in practice that they had to entrust themselves to Nature far more than Emerson did. The old sage had argued that Nature was the first influence upon the mind of Man, but for Muir Nature became the alpha and omega of life" (Cohen 51).

not a mirror for the moods of the mind" (*JM* 190). From this perspective, while Emerson holds nature in respect for the presence of the deity preoccupied with human intentions, Muir esteems nature for its own sake. To Muir, nature can enlighten human minds with its spiritual power, but it is not a storehouse of resources for human minds to receive whatever metaphysical truths or spiritual revelations they deem appropriate for their transcendental visions. Nature has an active agency but is not a passive reflection of human mind. Hence, Emersonian Transcendentalism only provides one ladder in Muir's development toward his vision of nature.

Searching for a language to convey his spiritual outlook, Muir integrated Emersonian Transcendentalism with Christianity to invent a new literary vocabulary for his perception of nature as a source of spiritual enlightenment. In fact, his writings are replete with Christian metaphors that provide Muir with a religious language to express his ecstasy and spiritual insights he derived from his wilderness experiences. In contrast to his father's Calvinist faith, Muir's interpretation of Christianity is based on a loving God whose tangible presence is most perceptible in his Creations. For Muir, nature is not a storehouse of raw materials but a place where he can experience God directly. While Stephen Fox suggests that Muir's thousand-mile walk represents a "permanent break from Christianity" (50) and characterizes his later religious orientation as "pantheistic" (70, 80), I agree with Daniel J. Philippon that "John Muir remained fiercely Christian - progressive though he was - until the very end" (Philippon 121). In Muir's life, Yosemite played a crucial role of spiritual awakening, affirming his religious view of nature as a direct source of divine revelation. In the beauty of nature, Muir experiences God's eternal love. Therefore, as John C. Elder states, "Biblical language is the vehicle with which Muir expresses his discovery of spirit throughout nature" (Elder 385). More significantly, since

Muir writes most of his books at a time of his involvement in political activism, his use of Christian language serves as an effective rhetorical strategy to appeal to his readers.[8]

To convey the spiritual impact of his encounter with the mountains, Muir often employs the Biblical language of Christianity. In *My First Summer in the Sierra*, Muir describes the forest and the mountains as "God's first temples" full of "Godful work," a sacred place where "one might hope to see God" (196, 22, 65). The Sierra Nevada mountains become the "Range of Light," with everywhere and everything "glowing with Heaven's unquenchable enthusiasm" (4, 137). Going to the mountains is like a pilgrimage: "Blessed, indeed, should be every pilgrim in these holy mountains! (138). By turning "howling wilderness" into "Nature's cathedrals," Muir follows the romantic tradition by changing people's perception of wild nature not as an obstacle to overcome but as a chapel where they can worship God. As Roderick Nash states, "The concept of wilderness as a church, as a place to find and worship God, helped launch the intellectual revolution that led to wilderness appreciation. The logic was that if nature embodies moral law and spiritual truth, then wild nature provides the most direct link to the deity" (Nash 2001, 268). If mountains become "cathedrals" for Muir, then a boulder is "an altar": "the one big stone with its mossy level top and smooth sides standing square and firm and solitary, like an altar" (*MFS* 64). On the Dome, there are "sermons in stones" (188). In climbing Cathedral Peak, Muir cannot help but celebrate it with "devoutly wondering, admiring, longing": "This I may say is the first time I have been at church in California, led here at last, every

[8] As Michael P. Branch illustrates, "Muir's use of religious language allows him to express his deepest emotions of revelation and inspiration in a vocabulary that his (primarily Christian) readership could understand. And in addition to using Christian metaphors to convey his own ecstatic experience in the wild, Muir perfected the propagandistic use of religious language to fight for environmental preservation" (2004, 147).

door graciously opened for the poor lonely worshiper. In our best times everything turns to religion," he continues, "all the world seems a church and the mountains altars" (336). In such a holy wilderness, Muir depicts himself as a preacher immersed in the heavenly beauty of Yosemite and spread the blessings to other people "like a missionary offering the gospel" (197).

Transformed by his epiphanies in the wilderness, Muir often describes himself as born and reborn into a new phase of spiritual world. John Tallmadge observes that Muir's *My First Summer in the Sierra* can be read as "a conversion story" in a literary and religious tradition. However, for Tallmadge, Muir's story differs from those conversion narratives of Christian saints because "his is a 'natural' conversion, that is, a turning to a religion of nature rather than to an established orthodox" (Tallmadge 1991, 62). In his writings, Muir uses the Christian imagery of baptism to express his experience of natural conversion. In a letter dated April 10, 1870, to his brother Daniel, Muir writes,

> I was baptized three times this morning. 1st…, by balmy sunshine that penetrated to me very soul, warming all the faculties of spirit, as well as the joints and marrow of the body; 2d, in the mysterious rays of beauty that emanate from plant corollas; and 3d, in the spray of the lower Yosemite Falls. My 1st baptism was by immersion, the 2d by pouring, and the 3d by sprinkling. Consequently all Baptists are my brethering, and all will allow that I've "got religion." (Badè I: 218)

By employing "baptism" as a metaphor for his intense experience of nature, Muir shows how he feels renewed spiritually and physically by his immersion in the beauty of the mountains every day. Near the end of chapter eight, "The Mono Trail," he writes that he has discovered "a new heaven and a new earth every day" (*MFS* 287). The landscape of

Yosemite baptizes Muir into a new life whenever he encounters the beauty of it. Moreover, Muir suggests nature is a place where human beings might be redeemed through baptism. In Muir's view, nature can purify human souls of sins. As Muir states, "Heaven knows that John Baptist was not more eager to get all his fellow sinners into the Jordan than I to baptize all of mine in the beauty of God's mountains" (*JM* 86). Muir's language shows his passion for inviting people into nature, away from civilization, and having them baptized in the holy mountains, and in the "shoreless ocean of rayless beamless Spirit Light that bathes these holy mountains" (*HLLOW* 185).

Muir sees the wilderness as another primary source for understanding God, a sort of Book of Nature to supplement the Bible. In attributing scriptural status to the natural world, Muir believes that nature, like the Bible, is God's primary text. If the Bible is the textual embodiment of spiritual truth for orthodox Christians, Muir intends to study the landscape and its plants and animals in various forms that are created directly by the hand of God. By reading the landscape that displays "divine hieroglyphics" (*MFS* 28), Muir repeatedly encourages his readers to recognize this page of God's manuscript. As Muir describes,

> Perched like a fly on this Yosemite dome, I gaze and sketch and bask, oftentimes settling down into dumb admiration without definite hope of ever learning much, yet with the longing, unresting effort that lies at the door of hope, humbly prostrate before the vast display of God's power, and eager to offer self-denial and renunciation with eternal toil to learn any lesson in the divine manuscript. (*MFS* 175)

Comparing himself to "a fly" before God's work, Muir is humble and enthusiastic to learn spiritual lessons from the grand book of "the divine manuscript." The power of God

humbles the presence of humans. In fact, Muir confesses to Jeanne Carr in an 1866 letter that he could "take more intense delight from reading the power and goodness of God from 'the things which are made' than from the Bible," though he maintained that the "two books, however, harmonize beautifully, and contain enough of divine truth for the study of all eternity" (*LF* l). Therefore, without relying on the Bible as the final authority of spiritual truth, Muir turns to nature and becomes a dedicated reader of those divine pages of God's work.

By recognizing nature as animate and the intrinsic value of nature itself, Muir moves from the nineteenth-century romantic and Christian anthropocentrism toward a biocentric natural theology. Muir, as Daniel J. Philippon points out, was "moving further away from narrow anthropocentrism and closer to an all-encompassing environmental ethic, in which every part of God's creation was connected and worthy of moral value" (Philippon 120). For Muir, nature is alive and full of spiritual energies: "How much more throbbing, thrilling, overflowing, full of life in every fibre and cell, grand glowing silverrods — the very gods of the plant kingdom, living their sublime century lives in sight of Heaven, watched and loved and admired from generation to generation! (*MFS* 70). Bathed in the mountains, Muir realizes that he is witnessing an everlasting process of God's creation. All God's creations, in Muir's view, have its place in the scheme of nature. In "A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf," an account of his experience before California, Muir recognizes the intrinsic value of some animals demonized by human culture. For example, as Muir writes, "Many good people believe that alligators were created by the Devil, thus accounting for their all-consuming appetite and ugliness. But doubtless these creatures are happy and fill the place assigned them by the great Creator of us all. Fierce and cruel they appear to us, but beautiful in the eyes of God" (*ATM* 148). Humans are accustomed to

viewing nature and its creatures through the lens of their interests and prejudices, but Muir sees them in a different light. Here Muir begins to develop a biocentric outlook,

> How narrow we selfish, conceited creatures are in our sympathies! How blind to the rights of all the rest of creation! With what dismal irreverence we speak of our fellow mortals! Though alligators, snakes, etc., naturally repel us, they are not mysterious evils! They dwell happily in these flowery wilds, are part of God's family, unfallen, undepraved, and cared for with the same species of tenderness and love as is bestowed on angels in heaven or saints on earth. (*ATM* 148)

For Muir, all the projected characteristics of "mysterious evils" of animals are the products of human cultural construction. Being able to transcend the popular view of nature from a human-centered perspective, Muir moves toward a biocentric appreciation of all species in nature. Muir imagines "God as having created the universe as a vast interwoven fraternity of absolutely equal members" (Buell 1995, 193). In Muir's view, each member of God's creations is equal and beautiful in the eye of its Creator.

Human being, from Muir's biocentric viewpoint, is no longer the master and the only measure of things in the universe, but a member of God's creation. Everything in nature have its inherent value independent of human judgment. In *My First Summer in the Sierra*, Muir criticizes those "sheep men" for their selfishness and blindness in their desire to get rich quick at the cost of nature:

> "Sheep men" call azalea "sheep-poison," and wonder what the Creator was thinking about when he made it, -- so desperately does sheep business blind and degrade, though supposed to have a refining influence in the good old days we read of. The California sheep-owner is in haste to get rich, and often does,

> now that pasturage costs nothing, while the climate is so favorable that no winter food supply, shelter-pens, or barns are required. Therefore large flocks may be kept at slight expense, and large profits realized, the money invested doubling, it is claimed, every other year. This quickly acquired wealth usually creates desire for more. (*MFS* 29-30)

For Muir, in order to get "larger profits" and acquire more "wealth," the "sheep-man" sees nature only in utilitarian terms. While the "sheep-men" dismisses azalea as worthless, Muir starts to question the anthropocentric viewpoint and thus refuses to judge nature in human terms. Muir's biocentric outlook "placed him at odds with his culture's commonly taught religious views concerning the biblically sanctioned, hegemonic right of human beings to exploit every aspect of nature" (Gatta 16). For Muir, all plants and animals in the wilderness are parts of an organic whole: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe" (*MFS* 211). Therefore, Muir's major contribution to American environmentalism consists of his pioneering biocentric vision of nature, in which humans and non-humans are equal and interconnected members of God's creation. In nature, Muir sees the web of relationships.[9] From this perspective, Muir is no doubt an early spokesman for modern ecological principles of wholeness and interdependency.

II. The Sublime and White Wilderness

Muir's writings are everywhere permeated with detailed descriptions of wilderness where an individual can personally encounter the extraordinary power of nature that evokes a sublime response. The whole of nature, for Muir, displays a divine image. Seeing godhead

---

[9] A biocentric outlook, as Thomas J Lyon states, "begins with the capacity to see relationships" (Lyon 655).

manifest in the landscape, Muir employs an aesthetic response to the sacred wonders of the wilderness. For example, as Muir describes, "Its glacial inscriptions and sculptures, how marvelous they seem, how noble the studies they offer! I tremble with excitement in the dawn of these glorious mountain sublimities" (*MFS* 147). Moreover, as Muir continues,

> Never before had I seen so glorious a landscape, so boundless an affluence of sublime mountain beauty. The most extravagant description I might give of this view to any one who has not seen similar landscapes with his own eyes would not so much as hint its grandeur and the spiritual glow that covered it. I shouted and gesticulated in a wild burst of ecstasy…. (*MFS* 153)

The magnificent beauty of the mountain landscape overwhelms Muir who shouts with "a wild burst of ecstasy." For Muir, on the one hand, "sublime" is a rhetoric used to express the intense moment of encountering magnificent nature, "the highest emotions of awes and wonder through scenes almost 'impossible to describe for their vastness and complexity'" (Oravec 249). On the other hand, by following the convention of the aesthetic discourse, Muir strives to invite his educated, upper-middle-class readers to appreciate the spectacular nature without feeling any dangers.[10] Through his writings, Muir guarantees his readers the experience of the sublime, urging them to join him in the outdoor activities.

The aesthetic discourse of the sublime, in fact, has changed people's perception of the wilderness. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the idea of wilderness changed due to the aesthetic discourse developed in England, Germany, and France. In the centuries

---

[10] However, in order to convey intensely personal and immediate psychological sensations for his readers, Muir seems to use "sublime" everywhere in his writings like a cliché. As Herbert F. Smith states, "Sublimity would not be sublime if it occurred too frequently, and such narrations as the preceding are rare in Muir" (67).

previous, the wilderness had been thought of as a howling, barren, desolate place: “places of desert, loneliness, and danger – wastelands where a man without his community might find himself subject to every sort of terror and where inevitably he would fall prey to abject despair” (Porter 8). Therefore, the idea of the sublime has transfigured the wild nature into a sacred temple of God: “Satan’s home had become God’s own temple” (Cronon 1996, 72). Those sublime landscapes were constructed as rare places on earth where one had more chance than elsewhere to have a glimpse of God. The wilderness began to take on cultural meanings of awe and reverence.

In *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of Sublime and Beautiful* (1759), Edmund Burke explains that the sublime “comes upon us in the gloomy forest, in the howling wilderness, in the form of lion, the tiger, the panther, or rhinoceros” (Burke 109). Burke argues that the infinity of nature “has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime” (Burke 115). In other words, the sublime is the effect of an object which inspires terror in the mind of the subject. As Burke describes,

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (Burke 86)

Burke thus associates the sublime with terror by relating nature to simultaneous fear and exhilaration: “the passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment” and that Astonishment “is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree” (Burke 101). Nature astonishes the subject to the highest

when "the mind is so entirely filled with the object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it" (Burke 101). A natural object provokes terror at the moment when the subject becomes overwhelmed by its power and magnitude. The enormous power of natural object absorbs the subject to the point where the subject can no longer reason or act. In a sublime moment, the mind is astonished to a suspension of activity by the sheer excessiveness of the object. For Burke, throughout *The Enquiry*, the sublime exists within those objects and natural phenomena that overwhelm the perceiver.[11]

In contrast to Burke, Kant places the sublime on the mind of the perceiver. In Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), there is the transition from the Burkean sublime to the Kantian sublime because Kant shifts the primacy of aesthetic judgment from an object-centered to a subject-centered criticism. As Kant claims, "it is the disposition of soul evoked by a particular representation engaging the attention of the reflective judgement, and not the object, that is to be called sublime" (Kant *CJ* 81). Here, Thomas Weiskel's model proves very useful to elaborate on Kant's idea of the sublime. Weiskel divides the sublime moment into three "phases or economic states": a normal, essentially pre-sublime stage in which "the mind is in a determinate relation to the object"; then a sort of rupture in which a disequilibrium between mind and object is introduced; and, finally, a "reactive phase" in which equilibrium is restored (Weiskel 23-24). At the moment of the sublime, Kant writes,

---

[11] Burke, as Meg Armstrong states, "is clearly interested in the psychological reaction to beautiful or sublime objects, but the emphasis is placed on the properties of objects themselves in aesthetic experience as they affect the eye, the primary organ of sensibility, rather than on the function of particular faculties" (Emphasis original, 217).

> Bold, overhanging, and, as it were, threatening rocks, thunder-clouds piled up the vault of heaven, borne along with flashes and peals, volcanoes in all their violence of destruction, hurricanes leaving desolation in their track, the boundless ocean rising with rebellious force, the high waterfall of some mighty river, and the like, make our power of resistance of trifling moment in comparison with their might. (Kant *CJ* 91)

The power of nature overwhelms human viewers in terms of its mightiness and mysteriousness. The sublime presents the idea of vastness to the mind. Both Burke and Kant view the sublime as a disorienting confrontation with a natural object. It is at this critical moment of sublimity that a dialectical relationship between human self and nonhuman nature develops. As Kant describes in *The Critique of Judgment*, "in what we are wont to call sublime in nature there is such an absence of anything leading to particular objective principles and corresponding forms of nature, that it is rather in its chaos, or in its wildest and most irregular disorder and desolation, provided it gives signs of magnitude and power, that nature chiefly excites the idea of the sublime" (Kant *CJ* 77). In order to focus on "pure" judgments of the beautiful and sublime from all of the secondary "interests" in Burke's account, Kant argues that the sublime resides in the human faculties themselves: "instead of the object, it is rather the cast of the mind in appreciating it that we have to estimate as sublime" (Kant *CJ* 86).

The idea of the sublime provides a vocabulary for speaking about the unspeakable when a subject is shocked by nature in awe and fear. The inability to express and represent nature at the sublime moment underscores the human limitations in the face of a natural

world.[12] The sublime causes a gap between word and thing, contributing to the failure of representation. The sublime, as Kant writes, is "brought about by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful" (*CJ* 75-6). Only an external object which overwhelms the subject will bring about an impediment, "a momentary check." According to Kant, the sublime is "extralinguistic" because it takes place in the space in which extraordinary nature exceeds the capacity of our cognitive faculties, at that moment when "with the advance of apprehension comprehension becomes more difficult at every step and soon attains its maximum" (*CJ* 82). The collapse of conceptualization leads to a moment of silence. Here silence operates as a figure for human beings' inability to represent nature conceptually or linguistically. Accordingly, the sublime can be understood as that which surpasses the human ability to comprehend as it forces the subject to the edge of terror. For Burke, in experiencing the sublime, "we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated" (Burke 111). Similarly, Kant states that "the irresistibility of the might of nature forces upon us the recognition of our physical helplessness as beings of nature" (Kant *CJ* 92). Part of the sublime experience is the recognition that human beings are mortal creatures with limitations, "beings of nature" whose lives are entirely dependent on

---

[12] There occurs an ethical dimension to the aesthetic moment when human subject is confronted by nature's mystery and strangeness. The Kantian rupture between our perception of nature and the failure of our imagination to grasp embodies the possibility of an ecological sublime. As Christopher Hitt claims, "its significance in the context of the ecological sublime is that it ultimately yields a heightened understanding" (Hitt 611). From an ecocritical perspective, as Paul Outka argues, "the sublime might be useful to contemporary ecocritical debates over how we can understand nature as both extra-human materiality and as human construct, offering a powerful model for blending a sense of nature as text with the sense of it also existing independently, unrepresentably outside our textual constructions, with claims and rights of its own" (Outka 16).

the web of life as a whole. The sublime experience begins with the fear of a natural object which the imagination is unable to grasp. The result is a kind of cognitive confusion. However, for Kant, this rupture will be ultimately overcome by the triumphant emergence of reason and finally, his "pre-eminence over nature."

The final stage of Kant's idea of the sublime suggests an anthropocentric attitude toward the external world, confirming the superiority of the perceiving human subject over the passive natural object. The conventional discourse of the sublime operates to confirm the authority and autonomy of a subject over and against a threatening other. In this final stage of the sublime, as Kant puts it, "a feeling for the sublime in nature is hardly thinkable unless in association with an attitude of mind resembling the moral" (Kant *CJ* 99). As for the object, nature "sink[s] into insignificance before the ideas of reason" (*CJ* 87). By rejecting nature as a source of the sublime, Kant emphasizes the human mind's capacity to achieve the sublime through the recognition of our superiority to the natural world. From this perspective, nature is further alienated from humans by the sublime. In the tradition of the Kantian sublime, nature becomes trivial and irrelevant, a mere metaphor in a process for the glory of human faculties, because the conventional sublime seeks to reestablish the comprehensibility of nature. Thus, Kant's idea of the sublime serves to reassert the supremacy of the subject at the expense of the external world. As Paul Outka points out, "The subject's assertion of categorical difference from the landscape at the peak of the Kantian subline is also a form of self-assertion, of self-definition. Indeed, it is a triumph of human dignity over physical power" (Outka 19). Therefore, in the Kantian model, the sublime experience is theorized as a movement from transitory self-diminution to eventual self-elevation of the subject.

Nature plays only an instrumental role in the achievement of transcendence in the

subject's mind. Kant complicates the Burkean model by describing the subject's capacity to feel as if the subject transcended the power at an aesthetic moment. The fundamental role of reason in the sublime is to impel the imagination to continue the job of comprehending the inconceivable. The sublime becomes a witness to reason's extraordinary power. As Kant writes, "the point of capital importance is that the mere ability even to think [the infinite] as a whole indicates a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense.… [This ability] requires the presence in the human mind of a faculty that is itself supersensible" (*CJ* 85). Here the aesthetic of the sublime can be seen as an expression of asymmetrical power relationships between the subject and the object because the core of Kantian sublime consists in the elevation of mind in the subject. For Kant, a natural object "lends itself to the presentation of a sublimity discoverable in the mind" (*CJ* 76). Kant not only establishes a subjective ground for his sublime aesthetic, but also renders the physical world nothing more than a means to an end. The subject's attention is turning away from the external world. In this view, while nature becomes inconsequential, the subject is triumphant. As Thomas Weiskel comments, the Kantian sublime suggests "the conversion of the outer world into a symbol for the mind's relation to itself" (Weiskel 85). Nature is thus reduced to a "mere nothing," leaving only the human subject in its victory. As a result, while the aesthetic discourse of sublimity has helped change the perception of the wilderness in general since the eighteenth century, at least the Kantian sublime still remains anthropocentric in its continuity to inform the way a human subject perceives, and acts toward, the otherness of nature.

While Kant represents the ability to produce the sublime as a universal experience that triumphantly marks the subject's intrinsic freedom in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), his earlier theoretical formulation of aesthetic judgement is situated against cultural,

gendered, racial, or national "impurities." Published only six years after Burke's Enquiry, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) shows Kant's emphasis on the importance of the subject's disposition, rather than the nature of external things. This focus allows Kant to sort through the capacities of different personalities, sexes, races, and national characters on the basis of their abilities in each individual's response to the beautiful and sublime. Thus, according to Meg Armstrong, "[o]ne might regard the *Observations* as a classificatory chart of all the impure aesthetic judgments, those tainted with material or other interests as well as the perceptual and corporeal matrices provided by cultural constructions of gender, race, and nation" (Armstrong 221). In the fourth section entitled "Of National Characteristics, so far as They Depend upon the Distinct Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime," Kant's earlier version of the sublime is in fact racially marked:

> Of the peoples of our part of the world, in my opinion those who distinguish themselves among all others by the feeling of the beautiful are the Italians and the French, but by the feeling for the sublime, the Germans, English, and Spanish. Holland can be considered as the land where the finer taste becomes largely unnoticeable (*OFBS* 97)

In this section, there are generalizations about the tastes of Arabs, Japanese, Chinese, "Negroes of Africa," and North American "savages." Among these different races, "[t]he Negroes of Africa" fail to produce the sublime because they have "by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling" (*OFBS* 110). In Kant's complete dismissal of "Negroes" and "savages" as lacking any finer feeling of the beautiful and sublime, the sublime is marked as a unique racial experience for some civilized white European men.

Kant's earlier writing makes it clear that he does not view the ability for the finer feeling of the sublime as universal. The failure to experience the sublime is, accordingly, a

mark of the subject's degradation and a sign of racial inferiority. Since the sublime for Kant is the disposition of a subject capable of aesthetic judgement, the ability to experience the sublime reveals a certain superior racial type or national character. As Kant describes,

> In the national character that bears the expression of the sublime, this is either that of the terrifying sort, which is a little inclined to the adventurous, or it is the feeling for the noble, or for the splendid. I believe I have reason to be able to ascribe the feeling of the first sort to the Spaniard, the second to the Englishman, and the third to the German. (*OFBS* 98)

In Kant's generalizations, the sublime demonstrates not only different races' capacities for aesthetic judgment but also "their own performance as noble, terrifying, and splendid emblems of the sublime" (Armstrong 227). Hence, as the aesthetic discourse presupposes some essentialized characteristics in the perceiver, it is deeply connected to the construction of stereotypes in terms of race, class, and gender.

Throughout *My First Summer in the Sierra*, Muir uses the sublime more like a rhetoric strategy to express his admirations for the spectacular beauty of nature and to serve as a political purpose for his environmental campaign to create a national park; however, he assumes that the sublime is a universal experience for all human perceivers. In the book, however, the other human characters' responses to the wilderness are actually conditioned by different factors. In spite of his ecstasy and exhilaration, Muir often recognizes people's lack of the capacity to appreciate the beautiful and sublime of nature. He finds shepherds, tourists, and even some of well-educated professors who are afflicted by apathy and blindness toward the divine manifestations of God in the mountains. Among these people, Muir provides vivid description of the shepherd Billy and his unwillingness to appreciate the beauty of nature in terms of the Kantian aesthetic discourse. Muir tries to persuade Billy

into seeing Yosemite as he did, but Billy stubbornly refuses. As Muir depicts,

> I have been trying to get him to walk to the brink of Yosemite for a view, offering to watch the sheep for a day, while he should enjoy what tourists come from all over the world to see. But though within a mile of the famous valley, he will not go to it even out of mere curiosity. "What," says he, "is Yosemite but a canon -- a lot of rocks -- a hole in the ground -- a place dangerous about falling into -- a d--d good place to keep away from." "But think of the waterfalls, Billy--just think of that big stream we crossed the other day, falling half a mile through the air--think of that, and the sound it makes. You can hear it now like the roar of the sea." Thus I pressed Yosemite upon him like a missionary offering the gospel, but he would have none of it. "I should be afraid to look over so high a wall," he said. "It would make my head swim. There is nothing worth seeing anyway, only rocks, and I see plenty of them here…." (*MFS* 197-8)

Different from Muir's aesthetic perception, Billy experiences Yosemite as "a hole in the ground" that it would make him "head swim" to "look over so high a wall." The difference between Billy's and Muir's responses, in my view, is that between Burkean and Kantian models of the sublime. For Billy, wilderness exerts its extraordinary power that overwhelms him with fear and terror; thus, the sublime resides in the natural object. However, for Muir, the landscape stimulates in his mind a feeling of ecstasy and elevation as the sublime exists in the human subject. On the other hand, Billy understands Yosemite from a practical viewpoint rather than an aesthetic perspective. Yosemite, for Billy, is simply a place for the sheep to forage, rather than a sacred temple as Muir perceives it. For

Billy, Yosemite is a place to work, not a place for spiritual transcendence.[13]

The sublime is a cultural construct employed to further justify the separation of nature from culture. In his "The Trouble with Wilderness," William Cronon critiques the contemporary inclination to idealize wild nature. This tendency, as he notes accurately, is attributed to the aesthetic discourse of the sublime popularized by European Romanticism. Calling into question the "habits of thinking that flow from this complex cultural construction called wilderness" (Cronon 1996, 81), Cronon suggests that in the tradition of sublime, wilderness comes to represent a "flight from history." As Cronon writes,

> the false hope of an escape from responsibility, the illusion that we can somehow wipe clean the slate of our past and return to the tabula rasa that supposedly existed before we began to leave out marks on the world. The dream of an unworked natural landscape is very much the fantasy of people who have never themselves had to work the land to make a living. (1996, 80)

The fundamental problem with the concept of sublime wilderness, for Cronon, is that it depends on and reinforces the notion of nature's otherness, of the separation between the human and nonhuman worlds. In *My First Summer in the Sierra*, Muir often disparages those who work in the wilderness, especially the "sheep-men," not only for their spiritual degradation in their blindness to the beauty of nature, but also for their physical and psychological degeneration. For example, Muir describes Billy as "a queer character" and ridicules his dirty clothes: "his wonderful everlasting clothing on…. These precious

---

[13] As Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo point out, "Yosemite is not an idle place of sightseeing, but a workplace. His knowledge of Yosemite is not that of the sublime aesthetic transposed from Europe but an intimate knowledge derived from on-the-ground practices in Yosemite. Muir and Billy's encounter is not a meeting of wisdom and ignorance but a clash of different knowledges and worldviews" (DeLuca and Demo 552-553).

overalls are never taken off, and nobody knows how old they are" (*MFS* 171-173). In Muir's view, the shepherd who has worked alone for a long time in the wild nature often becomes "insane": "his health suffers, reacting on his mind; and seeing nobody for weeks or months, he finally becomes semi-insane or wholly so" (*MFS* 31); "the California shepherd, as far as I've seen or heard, is never quite sane for any considerable time. (*MFS* 32). For Muir, the sublime landscape is a holy temple for worship, inspiration, and spiritual pilgrimage.

By advocating the pristine wilderness as a sacred place for physical invigoration and spiritual renewal, Muir pleads for its preservation as a setting not for work, but for play and leisure. From this perspective, the sublime Western landscape becomes the "pleasure ground" for white tourists. In doing so, those ugly and dirty things, no matter whether they are animals or humans, must vanish from the "pure" and "clean" nature. As Muir writes,

> The dusty, noisy flock [of sheep] seems outrageously foreign and out of place in these nature gardens, more so than bears among sheep. The harm they do goes to the heart, but glorious hope lifts above all the dust and din and bids me look forward to a good time coming, when money enough will be earned to enable me to go walking where I like in pure wildness. (*MFS* 261-62)

The wilderness is not only marked with the class structure in its distinction between labor and leisure, but also racialized as a space for white tourists. For Muir, out of his passion for the aesthetic and spiritual value of wilderness, he tries hard to urge his fellow people to see the sublime nature by themselves and thus come to support the campaign to protect it. Muir appeals to his readers and members of the Sierra Club, an audience composed of white, urban, educated, upper-middle-class elites, to join him in his political crusade to preserve inviolate large tracts of uninhabited land. In Muir's vision, these wild lands should

be protected not as a site for productive labor, but rather as an exclusive place of recreation. Following Muir, early American environmentalists have established a model of embracing the "pristine" wilderness as a vacation destination for tourists. The wild nature has become a place for tourists to visit, not a place to live and work.[14]

The sublime wilderness serves as a primal scene for the construction of white identity which asserts its difference between a white male subject with the capacity for aesthetic experience and racial and classed others in lack of finer feelings. Experiences of sublime wilderness have been largely limited to a group of elitist Euro-American men whose notion of nature has been legitimatized as normative. In other words, the unique, privileged white male's experience of the wild nature as pure, sublime, and transcendent has been naturalized as a universal way of seeing nature in the national park discourse. For Muir, Yosemite is worthy of being preserved because it serves as an exemplar par excellence of sublime wilderness, of his idealized nature. As Muir describes in "The Treasures of the Yosemite": "On shining morning, at the head of the Pacheco Pass, a landscape was displayed that after all my wanderings still appears as the most divinely beautiful and sublime I have every beheld" (*HLLOW* 587). Muir's experience of Romantic sublimity in Yosemite will go on to serve as a model of appreciating wild nature around the world. However, the ahistorical ecstasy of transcendence he describes in the passage has in fact erased Muir's own position as a privileged white man in the historical context of the nineteenth-century United States. Moreover, the extra-historical experience

[14] In his "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," environmental historian Richard White states, "Environmentalists so often seem self-righteous, privileged, and arrogant because they so readily consent to identifying nature with play and making it by definition a place where leisured humans come only to visit and not to work, stay, or live" (White 1996, 173).

overlooks the historical reality of indigenous dispossession that has made the sublime possible, ignores the terrible brutality required to maintain the color line which fenced off the wilderness only for privileged people, and displaces white anxiety over the massive influx of immigrants that might pollute the racial purity.[15] Hence, the sublime wilderness, in the nineteenth-century historical context, is constructed as a sanctuary of white identity, masculinity, and nationalism while the cities are places contaminated with all the pollutants, unwanted others.[16]

In postbellum United States, not everyone could walk freely and safely in the wild nature; nonwhite people might encounter harassment, assault, and even death if they wandered in the rural or wild places. Not every place welcomed racial, classed, and gendered others.[17] For Muir, the spectacular wonders of the Western landscape was incorporated into a discourse of U.S. nationalism in which wilderness is celebrated as "a cultural and moral resource and a basis for national self-esteem" (Nash 2001, 67). A

---

[15] In *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States* (2015), Carl A. Zimring points out, "New immigrants were characterized as pollutants threatening American purity rather than as raw materials just waiting for the transformative power of Americanization, in both sociological and biological disciplines by the turn of the century" (86).

[16] As Carolyn Merchant states, "Sublime nature was white and benign, available to white tourists; cities were portrayed as black and malign, the home of the unclean and the undesirable" (2003b, 385); "Wilderness was also associated with the formation of the American character, especially the male character. It was an arena in which men could reassert and reaffirm their masculinity" (2007, 147).

[17] According to William E. O'Brien, and Wairimu Ngaruiya Njambi, "[m]inority visitors were often unwelcome guests in American parks, even if their presence was not officially excluded. Collective memories of denial have helped to shape minority visitation patters even as overt discrimination has faded. (O'Brien and Njambi 20). Even prior to the 1930s in the national parks, Terrence Young identifies "an unpublicized policy of discouraging visits by African Americans" (Young 652).

national park was thus established as "a playground for the nation." However, even though national parks are open to the people, we must call into question what kind of "people" are referred to here. In his writings, Muir urges "everybody" to join him in taking a glimpse of the beauty of nature. He writes,

> The ancient glacier systems of the Tuolumne, San Joaquin, Kern, and Kings River Basins were developed on a still grander scale and are so replete with interest that the most sketchy outline descriptions of each…I can do but little more than invite everybody who is free to go and see for himself. (*Y* 194).

Who does Muir mean by "everybody"? In an era of racial segregation and xenophobic violence, we need to consider the following questions: who is "free to go" and explore the open space in the wild without meeting any risks or dangers? Who has equal access to the natural and recreational resources without economic or social barriers? In fact, Muir begins "The Treasures of the Yosemite" with the sentence: "The Yosemite Valley, in the heart of the Sierra Nevada, is a noble mark for the traveler, whether tourist, botanist, geologist, or lover of wilderness pure and simple" (*HLLOW* 587). In the nineteenth-century context, these legitimate visitors on Muir's list would be all white. From this perspective, Yosemite emerges as a racialized space for particular groups of visitors, a space "marked by economic barriers to access, by expressed and perceived animosities toward the presence of minorities and even exclusion of nonwhites" (O'Brien and Njambi 19). As a result, Muir's democratic rhetoric of "people" or "everybody" that actually marks whiteness as invisible legitimatizes his experience of nature as universal in the national park discourse.[18]

---

[18] Who can go and what to do in the sublime wilderness has been determined by the prerequisites of white wilderness. As Paul Outka points out, "By pretending to be a democratic home for all, a supposedly neutral test of spiritual advancement that produces a supposedly neutral – but in fact racially segregated – outcome

A white wilderness is constructed and managed as a "virgin land" devoid of humanity for tourists to appreciate the beauty and sublimity of nature. In 1901, Muir's series of articles in *The Atlantic* were collected and published as *Our National Parks*, in which he gives his readers a tour of Yellowstone, Sequoia, and Yosemite National Parks. The opening chapter is titled "The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West," and Muir begins by saying,

> The tendency nowadays to wander in wildernesses is delightful to see. Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life. (*ONP* 459)

Throughout these articles in the book, Muir promises his readers that they will find "wild beauty" and "sound solitude" in the wilderness experience. The wild nature in these national parks is clean and safe, providing pristine places where tourists can be spiritually renewed and physically regenerated. Parks and wilderness are reinvented as pure and sublime for the benefit of tourists but without any negative and dangerous encounters with unwanted others, such as the Native Americans. For example, when discussing the recent establishment of "Black Hills Reserve of South Dakota," Muir writes,

> Not very long ago this was the richest of all the red man's hunting-grounds hereabout. After the season's buffalo hunts were over, -- as described by Parkman, who, with a picturesque cavalcade of Sioux savages, passed through these famous hills in 1846, -- every winter deficiency was here made good,

---

the sublime wilderness functions both to mark and unmark race. The conclusion – that access to sublimity is racially marked and an experience that itself is a racial marking" (Outka 170).

> and hunger was unknown until, in spite of most determined, fighting, killing opposition, the white gold-hunters entered the fat game reserve and spoiled it. The Indians are dead now, and so are most of the hardly less striking free trappers of the early romantic Rocky Mountain times. Arrows, bullets, scalping-knives, need no longer be feared.; and all the wilderness is peacefully open. (*ONP* 464)

For Muir, a national park is a people's park; however, his idea of people does not include everybody. As Carolyn Merchant indicates, "Unpredictable elements such as Indians were removed or carefully managed for tourists so that they became part of the total 'wilderness experience.' The parks were vast managed gardens in which the wild was contained for viewing. People could have a wilderness experience in a protected environment" (Merchant 2003b, 382). The national park is thus reconfigured as a brand-new Eden where unwanted elements have been eliminated and the history of human inhabitation and indigenous dispossession have been erased.[19]

III. Muir's Representation of the Indian and The Politics of Wilderness

In *My First Summer in the Sierra*, Muir writes disparagingly of the Indians he encounters there, equating them with unclean animals that do not belong in the pure wilderness. As Don Scheese states, "unlike many nature writers who saw aboriginal peoples as a model for interaction with nature, Muir for the most part is critical of the Indians he encountered around Yosemite. This sets up one of the most curious and dramatic

[19] As Mark David Spence states, "these romantic visions of primordial North America have contributed to a sort of widespread cultural myopia that allows late-twentieth-century Americans to ignore the fact that national parks enshrine recently dispossessed landscapes" (5).

tensions in the book" (Scheese 66). However, while Scheese attributes Muir's negative view of the Indian to "nature writer's typical love of solitude" (Scheese 67), I suggest that Muir's view reveals the hidden racism in the early development of American environmentalism. On one level, Muir appears to believe that the Indians' relationship to the Yosemite environment is more balanced, more "natural" than that of white settlers. The Yosemite Indians, according to Muir, have not made "heavier marks" on the landscape. As Muir writes,

> [They] walk softly and hurt the landscape hardly more than the birds and squirrels, and their brush and bark huts last hardly longer than those of wood rats, while their more enduring monuments, excepting those wrought on the forests by the fires they made to improve their hunting grounds, vanish in a few centuries. (*MFS* 73)

For Muir, the Indians' impact "on the landscape is light as compared with that of the pick-and-shovel storms waged a few years ago" when "roads blasted in the solid rock, wild streams dammed and tamed and turned out of their channels and led along the sides of cañons and valleys to work in mines like slaves" (*MFS* 73). These "white man's marks," including roads, dams, mines, mills, fields, and villages, were made only "in a few feverish years" and it would take much longer for Nature to efface these marks and "heal every raw scar" (*MFS* 74). From this perspective, the Indians serve as a better model of "ecological" noble savage for Muir.

Muir associates the Indians with animals as parts of nature, not human agents who alter and shape the land. Throughout *My First Summer in the Sierra*, Muir writes admiringly of the vague Indian "instinct" of "walking unseen" like animals: for example, "One of the Indians from Brown's Flat got right into the middle of the camp this morning,

unobserved. (*MFS* 71). Muir is often shocked by but still admires this amazing ability, as he describes it,

> Happening to look up, was startled to see him standing grim and silent within a few steps of me, as motionless and weather-stained as an old tree-stump that had stood there for centuries. All Indians seem to have learned this wonderful way of walking unseen, -- making themselves invisible like certain spiders I have been observing here. (*MFS* 71)

In Muir's view, the Indians, like plants or animals, fit well into the wild landscape. Muir ascribes this "wild Indian power of escaping observation" to "hard hunting and fighting lessons while trying to approach game, take enemies by surprise, or get safely away when compelled to retreat" (*MFS* 72). Muir, as Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo claims, "clearly associates Native Americans with nature — spiders, birds, squirrels, and wood rats. They are constructed as a natural part of wilderness" (DeLuca and Demo 553). Like wild animals living in nature, the Indians are represented not as human agents who "improve" the land and leave marks on nature.

Muir often scorns the "uncleanness" of the Indians whom he encounters and compares them disdainfully against the purity of wild animals and nature in the wilderness. For Muir, although the Indians are constructed as a part of nature, they are in fact degraded and have become profoundly at odds with the Sierra landscape. In contrast to the divine and sublime landscape of Yosemite, the Indians are strangely "ugly" and "dirty." As Muir describes,

> Throwing down his burden, he gazed stolidly for a few minutes in silent Indian fashion, then cut off eight or ten pounds of venison for us, and begged a "lill" (little) of everything he saw or could think of, -- flour, bread, sugar, tobacco,

> whiskey, needles, etc. We gave a fair price for the meat in flour and sugar and added a few needles. A strangely dirty and irregular life these dark-eyed, dark-haired, half-happy savages lead in this clean wilderness, -- starvation and abundance, deathlike calm, indolence, and admirable, indefatigable action succeeding each other in stormy rhythm like winter and summer. (*MFS* 277-78)

From Muir's perspective, the Indians, unlike the "clean" indigenous animals and plants, do not belong to the wild because of their "dirty" conditions: "Though most Indians I have seen are not a whit more natural in their lives than we civilized whites. …The worst thing about them is their uncleanliness. Nothing truly wild is unclean" (*MFS* 303-04). With their "unclean" bodies as a stain on the face of beautiful nature, the Indians, for Muir, are "strangers to the wilderness, not in terms of ecology, but in terms of aesthetics" (Powici 79). The presence of the Indians becomes a blasphemy in a white God's temple.[20]

---

[20] In *God's Wilds: John Muir's Vision of Nature* (2020), Dennis C. Williams argues that "[t]he basis of Muir's relationship with God and his surroundings was purity. In Muir's worldview, the deeply rooted Western dualism between matter and spirit reveals itself. In a very traditional way, Muir perceived the world in terms of the clean and unclean, good and bad" (Williams 17). In Muir's dualistic view, the wild nature is pure and clean, in a unfallen condition while other ugly and dirty elements should be excluded. Filth, for Muir, is a metaphor for sin and spiritual degradation. In a similar religious viewpoint, in her *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (2009), Kathleen M. Brown contends that "[w]ithout the benefits of Christian virtue, human beings became mere animals, trapped in bodies that produced loathsome smells and toxic waste. A godly person, in contrast, restrained body and behavior to efface all connections to animals" (9). Interestingly, while Brown also points out that the "clean, nude skin of Indians had long caught the attention and captured the imaginations of European observers," she concludes that European accounts of Native Americans "oscillated between discourses of savagery, containing pejorative comments about filthiness and beastliness, and descriptions of well-formed, graceful, bodies with the smoothest, cleanest skin Europeans had ever seen" (Brown 51). In *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States* (2015), Carl A. Zimring indicates that there was "a racial hierarchy in which

Muir often finds degraded Indians to be wholly out of place with his romantic notion of pristine nature. In his view, they are either living an existence of animals or "debased fellow beings" who are not "a whit more natural than the glaring tailored tourists" (*MFS* 79). Moreover, the Indians also beg persistently for alcohol and tobacco, showing to Muir they have been corrupted by the vices of the civilization. As Muir writes,

> I tried to pass them without stopping, but they would n't let me; forming a dismal circle about me, I was closely besieged while they begged whiskey or tobacco, and it was hard to convince them that I had n't any. How glad I was to get away from the gray, grim crowd and see them vanish down the trail! (*MFS* 294-95)

The fall of the "noble savage" will inevitably lead to the final fate of extinction. As Dennis C. Williams states, "Muir's reflections on Indians illustrate his place in the Victorian social structure. He saw the Chukchi through the patronizing lens of an upper-middle-class man of science, though given the New Testament value on becoming childlike in order to be Godlike, it was not surprising that the Romantic notion of noble savagery played into Muir's images" (Williams 150). In fact, Muir's great works of nature writing about Yosemite are not in shortage of this message when he writes about the Indians: "they seemed to have no right place in the landscape, and I was glad to see them fading out of

---

white skin denoted the most advanced evolution of mankind" by the turn of the twentieth century (Zimring 88). According to Zimring, "the rhetoric and imagery of hygiene conflated with a racial order that made white people pure and anyone who was not white, dirty. A crucial concept in this reasoning was the idea that white skin was pure. The notion of purity was central in advertising during this period – purity in soaps and purity in food. Purity was synonymous with health and with reliability, and advertisers could convince the public that their products were safe and reliable with declarations of purity" (Zimring 89). Hence, for Muir, the Yosemite wilderness is a sacred white place of purity where those dirty, filthy, toxic "people of colors" must be banished.

sight down the pass" (*MC* 69). Muir seems to suggest the only fate of the "degraded" Indians is to vanish.[21]

Throughout his writings, Muir idealizes those landscapes devoid of the presence of human beings. In these places unmarked with human imprints, Muir feels free to enjoy the solitude in the beauty of nature and seek a timeless, transcendental vision. For example, in his book *The Yosemite*, Muir remarks on the pristine quality of the region: "In general views no mark of man is visible upon it, nor any thing to suggest the wonderful depth and grandeur of its sculpture" (*Y* 6). In *The Mountains of California*, Muir imagines the summit of Ritter as pristine space: "They decided to remain several days, at the least, while I concluded to make an excursion in the meantime to the untouched summit of Ritter" (*MC* 40). The most striking example is a place called Shadow Lake. As Muir depicts,

> I first discovered this charming lake in the autumn of 1872, while on my way to the glaciers at the head of the river. It was rejoicing then in its gayest colors, untrodden, hidden in the glorious wildness like unmined gold. Year after year I walked its shores without discovering any other trace of humanity than the remains of an Indian camp-fire and the thigh-bones of a deer that had been broken to get at the marrow. It lies out of the regular ways of Indians, who love to hunt in more accessible fields adjacent to trails. Their knowledge of

---

[21] In a recent *New York Times* article "Goodbye, Yosemite. Hello, What?" (2017), Daniel Duane points out that Muir's view of Indians is "depressing and painfully devoid of empathy": "The Indians he saw on trails struck him as filthy, and he was pretty sure nothing natural is ever filthy, so he concluded that they must not be natural. This was convenient for Muir, because it allowed him to imagine the Sierra Nevada not as a deeply human landscape with centuries of cultural history but as the one thing he craved most, a place of spiritual purity." However, in his *Travels in Alaska* (1915), Muir has become more sympathetic to the indigenous people in Alaska.

> deer-haunts had probably enticed them here some hunger-time when they wished to make sure of a feast; for hunting in this lake-hollow is like hunting in a fenced park. I had told the beauty of Shadow Lake only to a few friends, fearing it might come to be trampled and "improved" like Yosemite. (*MC* 85-86)

Muir describes the landscape in a pristine condition as if he were the first person to "discover" the place; however, "the remains of an Indian camp-fire and thigh-bones of a deer" betray the contradiction in his imagination. Muir even wishes to keep Shadow Lake a secret place for himself and "a few friends." Immersed in his solitude in this "untouched" wilderness, he suddenly finds his dream shattered: "On my last visit, as I was sauntering along the shore on the strip of sand between the water and sod, reading the tracks of the wild animals that live here. I was startled by a human track, which I at once saw belonged to some shepherd" (*MC* 86). After all, it is Muir's own fantasy of no-man's land where he can enjoy freedom and solitude.[22]

---

[22] Native Americans, as environmental historians show, have lived in and around the Yosemite Valley for centuries, shaping the environment and creating a history of their own. Yosemite, far from a vacant place, was once home to a large population in the pre-contact times. According to environmental historian David Beesley, "[t]he population of Sierran native people is estimated to have been about 90,000 to 100,000 at its highest point, just before European contact. Most of this population was concentrated on the western slope where resources were greatest" (Beesley 21). The Yosemite Valley had been inhabited by a Miwok-speaking people called Ahwahneechees which means "people of the gaping mouth" (Worster 2008, 167). They lived in a close relationship to nature and developed a spiritual tie with nature. The relationship, as David Beesley points out, was "shaped by a basic belief in a shared existence -- plants, animals, and humans were part of a larger whole, and all had souls and spirits" (Beesley 23). The Miwok creation story further shows their intimate connection with their homeland:

> The Great Spirit gathered a band of his favorite children and led them on a long and wearisome journey until they reached the Valley now known as Yosemite. Here the Great Spirit made them rest and make their home. Here they found food in abundance for all. The

The "pristine" wilderness of Yosemite that inspires Muir is in fact created partly by indigenous people who have inhabited and altered their homeland for centuries. For example, the valley's open, garden-like appearance owes a great deal to Native American's regular setting of fires. The annual burning helped weed the landscape and maintain the open meadows. "Such interventions by Native Americans," as Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo claims, "made visible the sublime vistas that earned the valley its renown as a tourist wilderness destination" (DeLuca and Demo 554). In *The Mountains of California*, however, Muir views the open, park-like landscape as "natural" part of the wilderness. As Muir writes,

> The inviting openness of the Sierra woods is one of their most distinguishing characteristics. The trees of all the species stand more or less apart in groves, or in small, irregular groups, enabling one to find a way nearly everywhere, along sunny colonnades and through openings that have a smooth, park-like surface, strewn with brown needles and burs. . . (*MC* 103)

Thanks to the study of environmental history, we realize that Muir's "natural" landscape in the park-like Yosemite is in reality the product of human work. Before Yosemite became a

---

> streams were swarming with fish. The meadows were thick in clover. The trees and bushes gave them acorns, pine-nuts, fruits and berries, while in the forests were herds of deer and other animals which gave them meat and skins for food and clothing. Here they multiplied and grew prosperous and built their villages. (qtd. in Bates and Lee, 15)

However, white encroachment and disease had decimated the Ahwahneechees in the early nineteenth century, forcing them to abandon their villages and even join neighboring tribes. Years later, remnants of the Ahwahneechees and other Miwok-speaking peoples returned to Yosemite under Chief Tenaya; they continued to inhabit there until 1848 when miners swarmed throughout the Sierra Nevada foothills, and ultimately 1851 when they were killed and driven off by the Mariposa Battalion. Before the dispossession, Yosemite had been "a place where people lived, where they raised families, and where they obtained food, fibers, and construction and ceremonial materials that made their life possible" (Beesley 15).

national park, Native Americans had shaped the Yosemite environment by their wise use of fire for thousand years.[23] The indigenous use of fire had created the park-like landscape. Yet for Muir, Yosemite appears naturally untouched, ready for saving and preserving.[24]

Yosemite had been emptied out through the coerced eviction of its indigenous

---

[23] Today the environmental historians have pointed out that the indigenous use of fire in Yosemite had evolved with nature as part of the ecological system. Thus, the displacement of Native Americans and their ways of life, in addition to the National Park Service policy of the suppression of fire, has marked a profound change in the environmental history of the Sierra Nevada. In fact, John Muir does recognize the indigenous use of fire: "their brush and bark huts last hardly longer than those of wood rats, while their more enduring monuments, excepting those wrought on the forests by the fires they made to improve their hunting grounds, vanish in a few centuries" (MFS 73). While Muir attributes the use of fire to facilitating the search for game, there are actually many reasons for such frequent burning by Sierran indigenous peoples. Indeed, the lack of trees on the valley floor made hunting and gathering much easier. Native Americans also used fire to burn away brush and saplings, to the benefit of mature black oaks. From black oaks, they obtained acorns, the most important source of food. David Beesley states that "some anthropologists now call their actions a form of environmental management" (Beesley 16). As Yosemite historian Alfred Runte contends, "[f]ar from a random practice, the use of fire in particular helped encourage the propagation of desirable plants and animals" (Runte 38). Moreover, burning had created a relatively open space that deprived potential enemies of concealment for secretive movements. Since the Native American used fire mainly for food and survival, annual burning had also created an unexpected side-effect, that is, a park-like beautiful landscape that later inspired Olmsted and Muir. But as Alfred Runte indicates, "Yosemite Valley's native inhabitants had no conception whatsoever of scenic preservation; Yosemite Valley was strictly for the use and survival of the tribe" (Runte 9).

[24] As Rebecca Solnit observes in *Savage Dreams* (1995), "when Bunnell, Olmsted, and their peers rode into the valley and wondered at it for its resemblance to an English landscape garden, it resembled such a garden because it was one, an explanation that never occurred to them and their successors. Had it truly been uninhabited wilderness, they might have instead entered a forest so dense that the waterfalls and rock faces they glimpsed from above would not have been easily visible from the valley itself. …The touchstone for wilderness turns out to be an artifact of generations of human care. So the model for all the park preserves of wilderness or pure nature around the world turns out to be no more independent than any other garden, and the deterioration of its ecology is as much the story of a garden gone unweeded as a wilderness civilized" (Solnit 307-8).

inhabitants before it became a national park. In turning the indigenous people's homeland into a sublime landscape or a temple of God, Yosemite as a tended and inhabited wilderness was made anew into a pristine wilderness regained, with its human history erased. When John Muir arrived at Yosemite and was awe-stricken by its divine sublimity in 1868, the land had been purged of its original inhabitants. Nevertheless, interestingly, Muir is not unaware of Yosemite's former history. In a section called "Early History of the Valley" in *The Yosemite*, Muir writes,

> In the wild gold years of 1849 and '50, the Indian tribes along the western Sierra foothills became alarmed at the sudden invasion of their aeora orchard and game fields by miners, and soon began to make war upon them, in their usual murdering, plundering style. This continued until the United States Indian Commissioners succeeded in gathering them into reservations, some peacefully, others by burning their villages and stores of food. The Yosemite or Grizzly Bear tribe, fancying themselves secure in their deep mountain stronghold, were the most troublesome and defiant of all, and it was while the Mariposa battalion, under command of Major Savage, was trying to capture this warlike tribe and conduct them to the Fresno reservation that this deep mountain home, the Yosemite Valley, was discovered. (*Y* 226)

In his account, Muir sees nothing wrong with the removal of Yosemite's indigenous peoples by the military campaign. Muir also regards Yosemite's Native Americans as "warlike tribe" and describes the indigenous defense of their homeland and their resistance to the encroachments of miners as "their usual murdering, plundering style." In this view, "[f]rom the perspective of North America's First Peoples," as Rob Nixon states, "the white soul-dream of 'untouched country' has been a source of dispossession and cultural erasure.

It contributed, classically, to the Ahwahneechee's eviction from Yosemite as part of Yosemite's reinvention as 'pure wilderness'" (Nixon 241). Yosemite, far from a pure wilderness in itself, is the product of imperial violence and indigenous dispossession.

Yosemite was actually "discovered" and spawned in war, a "war of extermination." When the interests of miners and Native Americans clashed, and conflicts ensued, a state-armed Mariposa Battalion of volunteers was organized and invaded Yosemite in 1851. Determined "to sweep the territory of any scattered bands that might infest it" (Bunnell 99), the battalion became the first party of white men to enter the Yosemite Valley. During the military campaign, they systematically burned the Indians' villages and food sources so as to starve the Indians into accepting the government's offer of removal to a reservation. Dr. Lafayette Bunnell, a member of the battalion who later published his account as *Discovery of the Yosemite and the Indian War of 1851 Which Led to That Event* (1880), was both captivated by the sublimity of Yosemite and saddened by the tragic fate of the Yosemite Indians. However, the Indians had to go. In his account, Bunnell describes the death of Chief Ten-ie-ya's youngest son by a shot in the back, and the old chief's response: "His eye fell upon the dead body of his favorite son, which still lay where he had fallen, without having been disturbed. He halted for a moment, without visible emotion, except a slight quivering of his lips" (Bunnell 153).[25] Therefore, the sublime landscape of Yosemite is in

[25] As Bunnell continues, "As he approached Captain Boling, he began in a highly excited tone: 'Kill me, sir captain! Yes, kill me, as you killed my son; as you would kill my people if they were to come to you! You would kill all my race if you had the power. Yes, sir, American, you can now tell your warriors to kill the old chief; you have made me sorrowful, my life dark; you killed the child of my heart, why not kill the father? But wait a little; when I am dead I will call to my people to come to you, I will call louder than you have had me call; that they shall hear me in their sleep, and come to avenge the death of their chief and his son. Yes, sir, American, my spirit will make trouble for you and your people, as you have caused trouble to me and my people. With the wizards, I will follow the white men and make them fear me'" (Bunnell 156-

fact a cursed land, a ruined home tainted with blood in light of the dispossessed. As David Mazel points out, "Lafayette Bunnell's account…demonstrates the role of aesthetic landscape discourse in neutralizing the genocidal horrors of a paradigmatically violent 'environment,' the Euro-American invasion and conquest of Yosemite" (Mazel xxiv). Before it became Muir's sacred temple, a tourist attraction, and a national park, Yosemite was a battleground where killing, violence, and forced removal took place.

The symbolic gesture of renaming Lake Pyweack as Lake Tenaya culminates the U.S. imperial conquest of Yosemite and the succeeding remaking of Yosemite as a pristine wilderness by removing its native inhabitants. A place name is rarely just a name; from an indigenous perspective, place names and naming are in general loaded with cultural and spiritual understanding of the place. A place name, as Joy Porter points out, "signifies how a community perceives reality" (Porter 15). In this view, the renaming of a place by conquerors not only erases the history and destroys the web of stories and meanings that supports a community, but it also symbolizes the triumph of conquest. In his account of 1850-1 military campaign, Lafayette Bunnell records his suggestion of naming a lake after the old chief by calling it "Lake Ten-ie-ya." Assuming that there are no already existing names in a newly discovered landscape, Bunnell proposes to name it as a monument for future generations. However, Bunnell's act of naming is contradicted by the old chief's reaction. As Bunnell writes,

> I had handled him rather roughly the day before but as he now evidently wished to be friendly, I called him up to us, and told him that we had given his name to the lake and river. At first, he seemed unable to comprehend our

157).

> purpose, and pointing to the group of glistening peaks, near the head of the lake, said: "It already has a name; we call it Py-we-ack." Upon my telling him that we had named it Ten-ie-ya, because it was upon the shores of the lake that we had found his people, who would never return to it to live, his countenance fell and he at once left our group and joined his own family circle. His countenance as he left us indicated that he thought the naming of the lake no equivalent for the loss of his territory. (Bunnell 213-214)

In Bunnell's view, the Indians were disappearing from Yosemite and his naming would memorialize Chief Ten-ie-ya and his people who were "captured" near the lake. From this moment at this exact location, the Indians were going to vanish from Yosemite for good. In other words, Bunnell's proposal for naming the lake "Lake Ten-ie-ya" functioned to celebrate the destruction of the Indian chief and his people.[26]

Lake Tenaya is one of those places where the American idea/ideal of pristine wilderness is formed. As Rebecca Solnit states, "Tenaya is a name given from outside, neither about the lake nor about the man, but about an unpleasant incident almost entirely forgotten by Yosemite's visitors. Bunnell claims to Tenaya that the new name will give the man a kind of immortality, but what he is really doing is obliterating Tenaya's culture from the place and beginning its history over again" (Solnit 220). In *My First Summer in the Sierra*, Muir depicts Lake Tenaya as "a fine monument" to the old chief and his vanishing tribe:

---

[26] For Daniel Duane, the author of a recent New York Times article "Goodbye, Yosemite. Hello, What?" (2017), Tenaya Lake is an important place for him that he wants his ashes scattered there; however, later he is so shocked when realizing startlingly that Tenaya Lake "is named not in honor of Tenaya but in joyous celebration of the destruction of his people."

> The lake was named for one of the chiefs of the Yosemite tribe. Old Tenaya is said to have been a good Indian to his tribe. When a company of soldiers followed his band into Yosemite to punish them for cattle-stealing and other crimes, they fled to this lake by a trail that leads out of the upper end of the valley, early in the spring, while the snow was still deep; but being pursued, they lost heart and surrendered. A fine monument the old man has in this bright lake, and likely to last a long time, though lakes die as well as Indians. (*MFS* 222-23)

As this passage shows, the Indians are represented as "criminals" who are "punished" for their "crimes." Being pursued by the righteous American soldiers, the Indians finally surrender by the lake. "A fine monument" is thus created in the form of (re)naming the beautiful lake after the chief.

For Muir, Lake Tenaya is a beautiful place to enjoy solitude and tranquility in its pristine state without the presence of humans. In fact, twenty-five years after Chief Tenaya and his people were dispossessed and evicted, John Muir camped on the shore of Lake Tenaya. In a journal entry dated August 1, 1876, Muir describes,

> The lake with its rocky bays and promontories well defined, its depth pictured with the reflected mountains, its surface just sufficiently tremulous to make the mirrored stars swarm like water-lilies in a woodland pond…
>
> …This is my old haunt where I began my studies. I camped on this very spot. *No foot seems to have neared it*." (Emphasis added, *JM* 236)

With its human history erased and original name lost, Lake Tenaya is enshrined with its pristine beauty, as a pure wild place where "no foot seems to have neared it" Today, the National Park Service website introduces Lake Tenaya in the following words:

> Tenaya Lake is a magnificent High Sierra lake surrounded by granite domes, lodgepole forests, and Yosemite's vast wilderness. It is the largest lake in Yosemite's front-country. Because of its remarkable scenic qualities, its inviting blue water, and its proximity to Tioga Road, Tenaya Lake is one of the most popular destinations for summer visitors in Yosemite."[27]

Following Muir's vision and legacy, the national park discourse celebrates the beautiful and sublime of Yosemite by overlooking the human history of the landscape. If renaming a place is a deliberate act of erasure and forgetting, seeing the wilderness as "virgin" or "untouched," a place without history, serves as a denial of humanity to the indigenous peoples who have inhabited and shaped those places as their homelands. It is an erasure of their presence and their uses of nature as human agents, an omission required to maintain the illusion of the wilderness as a vacant space.

IV. Conclusion

By embracing a pure wilderness devoid of humanity in Yosemite, Muir established a way of seeing nature and preserving pristine nature in a national park that would go on to be championed by most environmentalists around the world in the twentieth century. In his various writings, Muir uses religious metaphors and aesthetic language to formulate his argument for the sake of the wilderness and its protection as he appeals to an audience composed of white, elitist, educated, upper-middle-class people. In contrast to the then-popular view of wilderness as worthless or an obstacle to eliminate, Muir endows wild nature with religious and spiritual significance. In an era of what Mark Twain calls the

---

[27] Please refer to the NPS website: https://www.nps.gov/yose/learn/management/tenaya.htm

"Gilded Age," Muir is the man who "articulated for Americans just how important it was for men to live in and through a loving relationship to Nature" (Cohen 366). The establishment of the national park in the United States would never have succeeded without Muir's pioneering work and vision. His writings have inspired many lovers of wild nature globally. However, Muir's vision is still limited in his idealization of Yosemite as pure space entirely uninhabited and unmodified by human activities. He celebrates the beauty and sublimity of Yosemite while disparaging those who make a living there and the Native Americans whom he regards as "ugly" and "dirty." Because his experience of nature is racially marked, we must call into question who had the access to the wilderness in the nineteenth-century historical context. From this perspective, the wilderness and early national parks are actually not available for everybody. The wilderness, like Yosemite, is in fact constructed as a white space for elitist tourists who are depicted as being capable of receiving the civilizing power from the beauty of nature and of turning their gaze toward the sublime landscape to achieve ahistorical, spiritual, transparent enlightenment. Moreover, because Yosemite has occupied a privileged position in the American environmental imagination, I suggest that we must pay close attention to how Yosemite has become Yosemite National Park by examining Muir's writings. In conclusion, Yosemite was never a "pristine" landscape as Muir imagines it but was once a homeland inhabited by Native Americans. Muir's sublime nature is in reality enshrined on a landscape created by a history of war, removal, and even genocide. From this perspective, the wilderness is not extra-historical but deeply storied, replete with human history that will shed light on how we see a landscape and how humans have shaped the natural environment.

Conclusion

Toward Multicultural and Transnational Experiences of Wilderness

This place called an island of immortals,
When, in fact, this mountain wilderness is a prison.
Once you see the open net, why throw yourself in?
It is only because of empty pockets I can do nothing else.

Anonymous, Angel Island Poetry (1910-1940)

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Abel Meeropol, "Strange Fruit" (1937)

We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams with tangled growth, as "wild." Only to the white man was nature a "wilderness" and only to him was the land "infested" with "wild" animals and "savage" people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery. Not until the hairy man from the east came and with brutal frenzy heaped injustices upon us and the families we loved was it "wild" for us. When the very animals of the forest began fleeing from his approach, then it was that for us the "Wild West" began.

Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933)

In the spring of 2012, my pregnant wife and I decided to take a trip to San Francisco by train before a third member came to our family. There were two reasons why we wanted to take the train, rather than an airplane, from Chicago to San Francisco. First, we were very interested in experiencing American railroad and seeing those spectacular scenery along the route. We had never been on a train journey for three days; one can reach any destination on the railroad in Taiwan in one day. Second, I hoped to see the old First

Transcontinental Railroad, built between 1863 and 1869, particularly the western section of it constructed by Chinese workers. Even though the railroad had changed its routes ever since its first construction, I still hoped to have a glimpse of the landscape and imagined how those workers labored in such environmental conditions. On the third day, the California Zephyr left Reno, Nevada heading toward the climax of our journey, the Sierra Nevada mountains, where Chinese workers overcame a Herculean task of building a railroad across the canyons, rivers, cliffs, and granite rocks in the mountains. While feeling awed by the beauty of the landscape, the blue Donner Lake like a crystal eye mirroring an azure sky, I was struck profoundly by the construction of the railroad on the steep cliffs. In my imagination, I was standing there, overlooking the Donner Lake, as if I were transported back to the construction site and saw those Chinese fellow workers laboring in the mountains. I wondered whether they would appreciate the beauty of the lake, the forest, or the mountains when they took a break from their hard work. Or did they perceive the natural surroundings as an obstacle to overcome, a potential danger to their lives, an end to their "gold mountain dreams"?

I was wondering what if John Muir met those Chinese workers in the Sierra Nevada mountains? During our stay in San Francisco, we also rented a car and sauntered to Yosemite National Park. Yosemite, one of the world's most famous national parks, electrified my whole body and soul with its heavenly and magnificent beauty when we reached the Tunnel View. I couldn't help but wonder, this was the Yosemite where John Muir appreciated the beauty of nature, dedicated himself to fighting for its preservation, and became the father of the institution called "national park." After our short but intense "baptism" in Yosemite, we traveled back to the city. The next day, on the Fisherman's Wharf, my wife asked me if we could take a boat to Alcatraz Island, the noted scene in the

blockbuster *The Rock* (1996). However, I told my wife to buy two tickets to Angel Island instead, a place my wife had never heard of. And I could see a pebble of confusion rippling on her face. Thus, I told her, when I studied in the graduate program in National Taiwan University, I attended Professor Te-hsing Shan's seminar on Asian American literature, and we read Angel Island poetry in the class. Those poems showed painful experiences of Asian American immigrants as they were detained on Angel Island.

In contrast to Alcatraz Island where crowds of tourist were seen everywhere, Angel Island appeared deserted or even forgotten though we did enjoy the tranquility there. We hiked on the trail, saw every building, took photographs, read all historical markers, and even touched those names of Chinese immigrants inscribed on memorial plaques. The old immigrant station was empty and silent! At the scene, I remembered one poem I had read, and its title was "On Re-Visiting Angel Island,"

> I cannot forget my imprisonment in the wooden building.
> The writing on the wall terrifies me.
> Returning here after forty-four years,
> I seek out poems now incomplete.
> But still I remember the memories of sadness, anger, and frustration,
> Memories we have kept from our children.
> The memories are etched in my bones and in my heart.
> Today we can stand proud as Chinese Americans,
> But I will never forget what happened here on Angel Island,
> Where our pain was carved in silence. (qtd. in Lee and Yung 108)

For Chinese Americans, Angel Island was a place of "the memories of sadness, anger, frustration" where the feelings of pain and exclusion were "carved in silence" on the wall.

Looking out to the ocean, I stood on the "gateway to America,"[1] and couldn't help but meditate: the infamous Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was passed into law as John Muir wandered freely and promoted the idea of wilderness preservation to his readers. After the completion of the railroad in 1869, out of racism and xenophobia, tides of anti-Chinese hostility began to spread across all the Western states almost at the same time when Muir started his career in Yosemite. Muir died in 1914, while the Angel Island Immigrant Station began to operate in 1910. There were hundreds and thousands of Asian immigrants confined on this small island. All of them were interrogated with questions and many of them were denied their entrance to the United States by its oppressive laws. Even if they might be finally admitted, there was no guarantee of those "unalienable Rights…Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" for them.[2]

While today millions of tourists travel to and marvel at natural wonders of Yosemite annually, the railroad history in the same Sierra Nevada mountains seems almost forgotten. In fact, the Chinese immigrants' hard work and sacrifice had contributed to opening up the West for economic growth and unifying a nation just torn apart by the bloody Civil War. As Maxine Hong Kingston writes in her novel *China Men* (1980),

> The Colorado State Legislature passed a resolution welcoming the railroad China Men to come build the new state. They built railroads in every part of the country – the Alabama and Chattanooga Railroad, the Houston and Texas Railroad, the Southern Pacific, the railroads in Louisiana and Boston, The

[1] I borrow the term "Gateway to America" from Erika Lee and Judy Yung's book *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* (2010).

[2] "Passing through America's gates, however, did not mean freedom from the exclusion laws. For many, the shadow of exclusion haunted them for years" (Lee and Yung 105).

> Pacific Northwest, and Alaska. After the Civil War, China Men banded the nation North and South, East and West, with crisscrossing steel. They were the binding and building ancestors of this place. (Kingston 146)

By building railroads almost everywhere in the United States, the Chinese workers sutured the post-Civil-War nation "with crisscrossing steel." These Chinese immigrant workers experienced the American land in totally different ways from Thoreau's and Muir's experiences.[3] Just as Patricia Nelson Limerick points out, "the immigrants would appraise, explore, and read the western American landscape in terms of jobs and income" (Limerick 1992, 1028). However, nobody remembers the names of those Chinese workers who were engaged in constructing railroads in the United States and of those who sacrificed their lives for building them.[4] On May 10, 1869, when the Union Pacific railroad and Central

---

[3] In a recent internet article "Beyond Gold Mountain: Yosemite's Chinese American History" (Feb. 28, 2018), Alison Singh Gee, based on Yosemite ranger Yenyen Chan's research, illustrates the Chinese American history of Yosemite: "In the early 1870s, some 300 of these [Chinese] men turned toward one of the most arduous and dangerous tasks available: building roads to Yosemite during the winter, when blizzards pummeled the surrounding mountains. The owners of the Wawona Hotel hired laborers to build the Wawona Road over the winter of 1875. The Chinese managed to build this road without the benefits of modern machinery—no bulldozers or drills. Instead, they took to solid rock with blasting powder and handheld picks. For more than four bitterly frosty months, the Chinese laborers built Wawona Road. They also constructed another 56 miles of stage-wagon road, which eventually became known as the Tioga Road."

In addition, Gee also explains the story of Sing Peak, a mountain peak in Yosemite named after Tie Sing, a Chinese worker who worked as a cook for Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, and his parties of powerful industrialists. "In honor of his service," as Gee writes, "the United States Geological Survey named Sing Peak after the affable cook in 1899."
https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/beyond-gold-mountain-yosemite-s-chinese-american-history

[4] According to Shawn Wong, there are roughly 1500 Chinese workers who died building the Central Pacific Railroad. As Shawn Wong states, "By way of comparison, two years before, at the battle of

Pacific railroad were eventually connected at Promontory Summit, Utah, there was a ceremony for the driving of the "Last Spike." In order to commemorate the completion of the first transcontinental railroad in the country, a photograph was taken and called the "Marriage of the Rails." Nonetheless, there was not a single Chinese worker appearing in this "wedding ceremony"; in fact, they were deliberately removed from the scene. The erasure marks their invisibility in the U.S. history ever since. As Maxine Hong Kingston explains in her story "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains" in *China Men* (1980): "While the demons posed for photographs, the China Men dispersed. It was dangerous to stay. The Driving Out had begun" (145).[5] Consequently, it was dangerous for a Chinese immigrant to wander in the open space.

If the anti-Chinese sentiment and the Chinese Exclusion Act targeted at Asian immigrants in postbellum United States, then the Jim Crow and its segregation laws assaulted African American bodies. As Carolyn Finney points out, "Collective memory for African Americans has been shaped by these two historical moments (slavery and Jim Crow), and they continue to inform African American environmental participation today" (52). The American land was a place of punishment and imprisonment for slaves, not the

---

Appomattox, one of the last conflicts of the Civil War, 700 soldiers died on the battlefield. Its history was documented, photographed, and memorialized. The generals' orders and speeches were recorded. Twenty-seven thousand Confederate soldiers surrendered. Do we know the names of dead railroad workers? Do we know where they are buried? Do we know what stories they told when they finally bored through the Summit Tunnel?" (Wong 23-24).

[5] As Shelley Fisher Fishkin points out, "The Chinese were driven out of scores of towns in California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. By one scholar's count, there were 153 anti-Chinese riots across the West in the 1870s and 1880s" (Fishkin 36).

source of freedom and liberation.[6] Even after the Emancipation, there were many laws that had kept African Americans "in their place." They were not allowed to go anywhere they wanted. As the Yosemite National Park ranger Shelton Johnson states, "one of the places where African Americans weren't 'supposed to be' was outside, in the wild." In fact, wandering in the wild was very dangerous for an African American in the Jim Crow era. One of the atrocious things that would happen to an African American is lynching. As Paul Laurence Dunbar shows in his poem "The Haunted Oak":

I feel the rope against my bark,
And the weight of him in my grain,
I feel in the throe of his final woe
The touch of my own last pain.

And never more shall leaves come forth
On the bough that bears the ban;
I am burned with dread, I am dried and dead,
From the curse of a guiltless man. (Dunbar 160)

By depicting the horror of an innocent man hung from a tree by a mob, Dunbar's poem shows an absolutely different experience of wild nature. As Cassandra Y. Johnson and J. M. Bowker indicate, "[l]ynchings served to further alienate blacks from wildlands because some of these acts occurred in isolated woodlands areas" (340). Due to this painful cultural

[6] In an essay called "The Land Question and Black Liberation" (1970), Eldridge Cleaver contends, "During slavery itself, black people learned to hate the land. From sunup to sundown, the slaves worked the land: plowing, sowing, and reaping crops for somebody else" (Cleaver 57).

memory, a tree in the wild would become a symbol of death for many black people.[7]

Although today the segregation laws are long repealed, their legacy still haunts the collective memory and imagination of African American people. Having worked as a ranger for many years in Yosemite National Park, Shelton Johnson has tried hard to make national park more inclusive and accessible to his African American folks.[8] However, in spite of his efforts to connect the history of Yosemite with African Americans, he still recognizes the powerful impact of those "laws" in the past: "Even once you remove all of the tangible barriers that keep certain people out, intangible barriers remain, the barriers erected in the imagination."[9] In her article "Nature and Environmental Justice," Mei Mei Evans discusses the African American experience of nature. As Evans states,

> while the idea of visiting a "natural" site may provide for many a feeling of comfort and security, not everyone reacts in such a way. She points to the story of Evelyn White, an African American woman, who expresses that her internalized fear of getting "closer-to-nature" is linked to a history of violence

---

[7] Used as a means to circumscribe the freedom of movement, lynching "succeeded in limiting the environmental imagination of black people whose legitimate fear of the woods served as a painful and very specific reminder that there are many places a black person should not go" (Finney 60).

[8] Shelton Johnson even published a novel called *Gloryland* (2009) about the story of buffalo soldiers who served as the guardian of Yosemite National Park before the establishment of National Park Service in 1916.

[9] In her internet article "Wilderness at 50: Our Wild and Civil Rights" (2014), Rue Mapp holds a similar view, "While Jim Crow-style terror in nature is no longer a common occurrence, the legacy of institutionalized exclusion of black people from recreational areas persists. A result of years of discrimination is that, for many people, the experience of being outdoors can feel more like an effort to conquer a fear than enjoyment for its own sake. And, still too often, many black and brown folks face unwelcoming (or over-welcoming) stares, questions, and attitudes while recreating in wild spaces."

> against her ancestors that encountered whites in rural wooded areas, away from the eyes of potential witnesses. (Evans 186)

For Evelyn White, "rural wooded areas" are dangerous places marked with "a history of violence against her ancestors." From this perspective, it is not difficult to explain why African Americans generally have associated the wilderness as a white space, not a space welcoming to them, and thus are more reluctant to participate in outdoor activities.[10] In fact, people of different races have different experiences and imaginations of the wilderness, and they have different environmental concerns. In an internet article called "Are there two different versions of environmentalism, one 'white,' one 'black'?," Brentin Mock points out, "Many African Americans were concerned that funds and resources needed for civil rights reforms were being diverted to new environmental causes. People of color didn't necessarily oppose environmental activism; they just didn't want it to come at the expense of civil and human rights." On the other hand, Mock claims that "it appeared white people were more concerned with cleaning up and preserving uninhabited lands – or what was perceived as uninhabited – to expand parks and wilderness areas." Therefore, to experience wild nature in a national park, far from a universal activity for everybody, is actually one

---

[10] Pondering over why there is a missing connection between the civil rights movement and the wilderness preservation movement in the 1960s, Rue Mapp discusses Carolyn Finney's book *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (2014) by pointing out, "Dr. Finney believes that, though linked to the civil-rights movement in time, the wilderness preservation movement (and the environmental movement, more broadly) missed a golden opportunity to address race that could have built greater harmony between people and nature, especially for African Americans. 'The conservation movement has traditionally prided itself on a concept of nature as pure,' she says, 'which for some, can also be translated to mean whiteness.'"

way of seeing and appreciating nature.[11]

The national park is only one episode of many stories about the wilderness; moreover, it is never a panacea for all environmental ills in a global context. In this dissertation, I suggest we confront the history of the national park in terms of imperial expansionism and indigenous dispossession in the nineteenth-century United States.[12] We also need to reconsider the tendency of "antihuman environmentalism" in the national park discourse.[13] In the contemporary world, establishing a national park to preserve wild nature and wild animals is usually considered "politically correct" (and "ecologically correct") for many third world countries, not only for the sake of environmental protection, but also for the potential economic value of tourism. The national park serves as a symbol of progress and civilization. As Julian Huxley points out, "In the modern world, as Africa is beginning to realize, a country without a National Park can hardly be recognized as

---

[11] In his *Wild Ideas* (1995), David Rothenberg suggests, "Wilderness is not everyone's idea of nature" (xv).

[12] As Carolyn Merchant points out, "But when parks came, Indians were expelled from lands they had long inhabited and ranged to create recreational resources for whites. Except as tourist attractions, Indians vanished from memory as well as from view. Wilderness was redefined as untainted by human presence, and parks were conceptualized as places where white tourists could be inspired by the sublimity of depopulated natural beauty" (Merchant 2007, 163).

[13] In a *New Yorker* article "Environmentalism's Racist History" (2017), Jedediah Purdy states, "But Muir and his followers are remembered because their respect for non-human life and wild places expanded the boundaries of moral concern. What does it mean that they cared more about 'animal people' than about some human beings? The time they lived in is part of an explanation, but not an excuse. For each of these environmentalist icons, the meaning of nature and wilderness was constrained, even produced, by an idea of civilization. Muir's nature was a pristine refuge from the city. Madison Grant's nature was the last redoubt of nobility in a levelling and hybridizing democracy. They went to the woods to escape aspects of humanity. They created and preserved versions of the wild that promised to exclude the human qualities they despised."

civilized. And for an African territory to abolish National Parks already set up or to destroy its existing wild life resource would shock the world and incur the reproach of barbarism and ignorance" (Huxley 94). In Huxley's view, those countries that intend to tear down a national park must be "barbarian" and "ignorant."

"National park" has become a new form of colonialism in the global context. When the United States began to export the idea of the national park around the world particularly after World War II, the exclusionary model of preserving wilderness as "people-free" landscape for the "enjoyment" of visitors has produced "conservation refugees." Conservation refugees, as Mark Dowie states, are "removed from their homelands involuntarily, either by force or through a variety of less coercive measures" (Dowie xxii). As Robert H. Nelson examines the issue in the African context,

> The greatest current efforts to "save" Africa are associated with contemporary environmentalism. The results have not been as devastating as the experience of slavery, yet they have often served Western interests and goals much more than the interests of ordinary Africans. In some cases, local populations have been displaced and impoverished in order to create national parks and to serve other conservation objectives. Under the banner of saving the African environment, Africans in the last half century have been subjected to a new form of "environmental colonialism." (Nelson 65)

The idea of national park, based on the romantic myth of a vacant wilderness, has been used to justify removing indigenous and local peoples from their homelands in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.[14] Moreover, the function of national park has become a "business

[14] For example, in his "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique" (1989), Ramachandra Guha points out, "…the emphasis on wilderness is positively harmful when

weapon" to protect nature from its native inhabitants for foreign tourists. As Nadine Gordimer shows in her short story "The Ultimate Safari": "There was a man in our village without legs – a crocodile took them off, in our river; but all the same our country is a country of people, not animals. We knew about the Kruger Park because some of our men used to leave home to work there in the places where white people come to stay and look at the animals" (Gordimer 272). In Gordimer's account, Kruger Park is created for foreign tourists to see wild animals in Africa by removing its indigenous people as unwanted elements. "A country of people" has been transformed into "a wilderness of animals" for tourists who have traveled a long distance to experience wild nature and an "authentic" Africa in a national park. Hence, in the name of environmental protection, "environmental colonialism" has resulted in a new form of domination in the broadening socioeconomic chasm between those native inhabitants who have been removed from their homelands to create parks and those wealthy foreign tourists who visit the parks for sight-seeing and pleasure.

In my dissertation, I have investigated the "Indian Problem" and deconstructed the wilderness as a cultural construct by reading the works of James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir. However, my

---

applied to the Third World…Because India is a long settled and densely populated country in which agrarian populations have a finely balanced relationship with nature, the setting aside of wilderness areas has resulted in a direct transfer of resources from the poor to the rich" (Guha 235). By focusing on the case of India in their book *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India* (1995), Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha state, "The guiding philosophy behind the management of these protected areas has been one of keeping the local people out by force of arms, on the theory that they are the sole cause of the degradation of nature"; "These conflicts have been reported from all over the country , from the Rajaji National Park in the north to the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve in the south, and from the Betla Tiger Reserve in the east to the Nal Sarovar Sanctuary in the west" (Gadgil and Guha 92).

intention is not to abandon the preservationist efforts to protect wild nature, but rather, as I suggest, to recognize that the human history of the wilderness can enrich our understanding of the relationship between people and nature by breaking down the dualism between nature and culture. In his influential "The Trouble with the Wilderness," William Cronon argues that we should shift our attention from the romantic idea of wilderness to our homes, the natural surroundings around us in our daily lives. As Cronon states,

> By imagining that our true home is in the wilderness, we forgive ourselves the homes we actually inhabit. In its flight from history, in its siren song of escape, in its reproduction of the dangerous dualism that sets human beings outside of nature – in all of these ways, wilderness poses a serious threat to responsible environmentalism at the end of the twentieth century. (1996, 81)

In Cronon's view, by idealizing a remote, pristine wilderness that needs protection, the white romantic environmentalism tends to ignore the problems of civil rights and social inequality. While Cronon's suggestion about shifting our focus from preserving a distant wild nature to caring for places where we live and work is understandable in the context of environmental justice movement, his controversial deconstruction of wilderness has still triggered "the Great Wilderness Debate" about what nature means in a postmodern world.

Even though the wilderness is dismantled no longer as a "pristine" nature, I suggest that an inhabited, storied wilderness is still worth protection efforts. In response to Cronon's article, poet Gary Snyder writes an article called "Is Nature Real?" (1996). As Snyder illustrates,

> Some of these critical scholars set up, then attack, the notion of "pristine wilderness" and this again is beating a dead horse. It is well known that humans and proto-humans have lived virtually everywhere for hundreds of

> millennia. "Pristine" is only a relative term, but humanly used as the landscape may have been, up until ninety years ago the planet still had huge territories of wild terrain that are now woefully shrunken. Much of the wild land was also the territory of indigenous cultures that fit well into what were inhabited wilderness. (Snyder 388)

In Snyder's view, deconstructing the wilderness by the academics will open the door for further exploitations: "The attacks on nature and wilderness from the ivory towers come at just the right time to bolster global developers" (388). In my view, there is no place on earth today that is not affected by human imprints in the Anthropocene Age. Even in those remote, relatively sparsely populated areas, we can still see impacts of human work in terms of global warming and climate change. Furthermore, cultural diversity is as important as biological diversity. In wild places, human's history and human's use of nature have often been deeply intertwined with nature's biodiversity. To take Yosemite as an example, the indigenous use of fire has altered and shaped the landscape for at least hundred years and has been embedded inseparably into webs of the ecological system. Therefore, as Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo state, "The deconstruction of wilderness as a founding concept, the revealing of wilderness to be unnatural, is not an argument for the abandonment of wilderness and preservation politics. It is to realize that an unquestioning embrace of pristine wilderness has political and social costs as well as benefits" (DeLuca and Demo 556).[15] Erasing human's history from nature's history to create a pristine

[15] In an article called "The Riddle of the Apostle Islands: How Do You Manage a Wilderness Full of Human Stories?" in *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate* (2008), environmental historian William Cronon focuses on the case of the Apostle Islands where a "deep human history" has marked the wild nature on the island from the Ojibwe people's inhabitation to various economic activities of fisheries, logging, quarrying, and farming. Cronon contemplates on the riddle of how

landscape is thus "unnatural."

For Native Americans and indigenous peoples around the world, denial of their rights and access to hunting grounds and scared sites in the name of wilderness preservation is an ongoing process of their conquest and dispossession. In her book *Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner and Other Essays* (1996), Dakota writer Elizabeth Cook-Lynn characterizes "the deliberate theft of a continent from its original inhabitants" as "America's oldest racial act" (Cook-Lynn 138). In fact, Native Americans have been removed from their ancestral homelands for various reasons, such as land expropriations, natural resources, and then national parks. In his novel *Wolfsong* (1995), Louis Owens examines the wilderness preservation from an indigenous viewpoint:

> The mountains have been taken from Indian people by white invaders and had been taken from invaders by the invaders' government and made an official wilderness area by government act. He'd read the words of the law. "In perpetuity," it said, to be "untrammeled." A half-million acres, just a small place. "This is a good thing they did," Uncle Jim had said, "because now maybe they won't cut all the trees and build roads. But if you think about it, it's pretty funny. When our people lived here long ago, before the white folks came, there wasn't any wild animals. There was only the mountains and river,

---

to manage a wilderness full of human stories: "To acknowledge past human impacts upon these islands is not to call into question their wilderness; it is rather to celebrate, along with the human past, the robust ability of wild nature to sustain itself when people give it the freedom it needs to flourish in their midst" (634). By recognizing the Apostle Islands as "historical wilderness" where human beings have played significant roles in its environmental history, Cronon believes that visitors will experience the islands with "a deepened appreciation not just for the wild nature they find here, but for the human history as well" (639).

> two-leggeds and four-leggeds and underwater people and all the rest. It took white people to make the country and the animals wild. Now they got to make a law saying it's wild so's they can protect it from themselves." (80-1)

This passage is full of irony and sarcasm. For Native Americans, it is white settlers who invade and steal their homelands. As settlers destroy nature and nature becomes "wild," the settlers' government makes a law to protect "wild nature" from themselves. For Louis Owens and other Native American writers, Wallace Stegner's idea of national park as "one of America's best ideas" is cruel.[16] Even if the "best idea" of national park has its contribution to the environmental cause globally, it is still necessary to confront the history and the establishment of the national park from indigenous perspectives.

In his poem "A Designated National Park," Simon J. Ortiz, a writer of the Acoma Pueblo tribe, tells a story of visiting the Montezuma Castle in Verde Valley, Arizona. His experience is complicated by the fact that the landscape now has become a "DESIGNATED FEDERAL RECREATION FEE AREA" and one has to pay "$1.00 FOR 1 DAY PERMIT" to enter the protected area. In order to go home, Ortiz has to pay a certain amount of fee and buy a ticket: "This morning, / I have to buy a permit to get back home" (235). Similar experience is encountered in another poem "Grand Canyon Christmas Eve 1969" when in Grand Canyon Ortiz and his son meets a U.S. Forest Service sign that reads: "KAIBAB NATIONAL FOREST / CAMP ONLY IN CAMPING AREAS / NO WOOD GATHERING / GO AROUND OTHER SIDE OF ENCLOSED AREA / & / DEPOSIT 85 CENTS FOR

---

[16] As William Cronon states, "The myth of the wilderness as 'pristine,' uninhabited land had always been especially cruel when seen from the perspective of the Indians who had once called that land home. Now they were forced to move elsewhere, with the result that tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing their nation in its pristine, original state, in the new morning of God's own creation" (Cronon 1996, 79).

WOOD." Here Ortiz becomes more enraged than confused:

> This is ridiculous.
>
> You gotta be kidding.
>
> Dammit, my grandfathers
>
> ran this place
>
> with bears and wolves.
>
> They even talked
>
> with each other about it,
>
> and you don't even listen.
>
> And I got some firewood
>
> anyway from the forest,
>
> mumbling, Sue me. (Ortiz 1992, 187-88)

For Ortiz, the protected area was once a homeland where "my grandfather" ran and talked with "bears and wolves." Ortiz violates the law deliberately because the law never respects the Native people. In addition, when the Native Americans visit national parks which were once their ancestral homelands, they have different cultural perceptions from those tourists who enter the wilderness to enjoy a "pristine" nature.

The idea of national park has been challenged by indigenous claims for using the land for hunting and fishing, holding ceremonies at the sacred sites, and even regaining their sovereignty over land by treaty rights or legal means.[17] As Robert B. Keiter writes,

---

[17] The U.S. National Park Service has developed different approaches to Native American claims. As James Morton Turner states, "in the case of the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, debates over protecting both native interests and new protected areas in Alaska demonstrate how Native Americans

> Over time, once Indian tribes began to assert themselves in political and legal arenas, the Park Service has found itself confronting an increasing array of challenges linked to historic land claims, treaty rights, and sacred sites. Not only do these controversies raise important ownership, access, and social justice questions, but they also pose important questions about national park conservation policies that sharply separate people and nature. (Keiter 121)

Following this thread of thinking, we can see these issues in the indigenous context in Taiwan where the Atayal people protested against Makauy National Park and the Ta'o people against Orchid Island National Park. In fact, there are four major reasons that indigenous peoples in Taiwan have protested strongly against the establishment of national parks on their homelands.[18] First, they propose to amend the 1972 National Park Law that has prohibited them from hunting on their ancestral homelands since the early model of wilderness preservation, based on nature/culture dualism, perceives humanity to be separate from nature. It also assumes every human use of nature is essentially exploitative

---

actively deployed the concept of 'wilderness' to ensure their continued access to homelands and subsistence resources they depended upon…" (Turner 298). Moreover, according to the National Park Service website, the NPS has begun to work with Native American nations about their access to the sacred sites in the park: "the Service will pursue an open, collaborative relationship with American Indian tribes to help tribes maintain their cultural and spiritual practices and enhance the Park Service's understanding of the history and significance of sites and resources in the parks. Within the constraints of legal authority and its duty to protect park resources, the Service will work with tribal governments to provide access to park resources and places that are essential for the continuation of traditional American Indian cultural or religious practices." https://www.nps.gov/history/tribes/documents/npsmanagementpolicy.pdf

[18] My reference source is based on an article "The Ta'o Tribe: Four Major Reasons to Protest Against Orchid Island National Park," dated March 14th, 1993 in *Orchid Island Biweekly*. http://catalog.digitalarchives.tw/item/00/11/a9/59.html

and ignores the indigenous rights to their traditional ways of life. Second, they have lost their rights to their homelands since the Japanese colonial period. Environmental degradation in Taiwan demonstrates a long history of colonialism, exploitation, and domination over nature and indigenous peoples. Third, indigenous peoples have fought for their rights to participate in the decision-making and the administration of national parks. Otherwise, in their view, they don't need any national parks and any "foreign" ecological thoughts imposed on their communities. From their perspectives, traditional lifestyles and wisdom that derives from their symbiotic relationship with nature for thousands of years have helped maintain the environment in a healthier way than the tourism-oriented national park can do. Fourth, they are deeply concerned that the business of tourism brought about by the establishment of national parks would contribute to more poverty, pollution, and cultural conflicts in their local communities.

Today, the idea of wilderness as "uninhabited nature" in its original state, from the perspective of environmental history, is nothing more than a cultural creation based on our wish-fulfillment. We imagine the wilderness as a blank slate onto which we project our longings and fantasies. By dismantling the idea of wilderness, I observe that we recognize the environmental and historical complexity in the history of the landscape. The deconstruction of wilderness, as Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo claim powerfully, "shatters the belief that wilderness is a natural object that people will 'naturally' respond to. Wilderness is not a natural fact, but political achievement" (555). By the same token, the model of national park is not a universal cure for all environmental problems in the world. Based on its early history of indigenous removal in the context of U.S. imperial expansionism, the idea of the national park has embraced the romantic myth of wilderness and treasured the vacant condition of the land. "With the creation of the first national parks,"

as Wendy Harding points out, "'empty' places became national treasures. Emptiness was no longer merely a term to designate sparsely inhabited spaces; instead it was a condition deliberately and systematically imposed on designated spaces where development was proscribed" (Harding 42). With its human history erased and unwanted elements eliminated, the national park space has been "sanitized" to look like new, pure, and innocent. The purpose is to create an illusion for tourists to seek an ahistorical, transcendent experience of the beautiful and sublime and even to feel as if they were the first people to set foot on a pristine land.

With my original interest in indigenous peoples' protests against national parks in Taiwan, I write this dissertation to investigate the romantic and Transcendentalist representations of the Indian and their imaginations of nature in the nineteenth-century historical context of U.S. imperialism and indigenous dispossession by reading the works of Cooper, Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, and Muir. My dissertation is a transnational attempt to explore a contemporary issue in Taiwan by tracing it back to the nineteenth-century history and literature of the United States. The limitation of my dissertation, or the possibility of a future project, is reading the works of nineteenth-century female writers and examining their representations of the indigenous people and nature. So far, I have explored more flexible, inclusive, multicultural, and transnational experiences of wilderness, recognizing that a wilderness has a human history, has been inhabited and used, and can still be celebrated for its biological diversity and ecological integrity. With its human's history and nature's history interconnected, a wilderness can be enriched by its stories for our understanding of the relationship between human beings and the non-human world.

Works Cited

Abbey, Edward. “Down the River with Henry Thoreau.” *Down the River*. New York: Plume Book, 1991.

Adamson, Joni. *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2001.

Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2010.

Allen, Gay Wilson. “How Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman Viewed the ‘Frontier.’” *Toward A New American Literary History: Essays in Honor of Arlin Turner*. Ed. Louis J. Budd, Edwin H. Cady, Carl L. Anderson. Durham: Duke UP, 1980.

---. *Waldo Emerson*. New York: Penguin Books, 1981.

Anderson, Douglas R. “Emerson’s Natures: Origins of and Possibilities for American Environmental Thought.” *New Morning: Emerson in the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. Arthur S. Lothstein and Michael Brodrick. Albany: State U of New York P, 2008.

Anderson, John Q. “Emerson on Texas and the Mexican War.” *Western Humanities Review* 13 (1959): 191-199.

Armstrong, Meg. “’The Effects of Blackness’: Gender, Race, and the Sublime in Aesthetic Theories of Burke and Kant.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54.3 (1996): 213-236.

Axelrad, Allan M. *History and Utopia: A Study of the World View of James Fenimore Cooper*. Norwood, Penn.: Norwood Editions, 1978.

---. “*The Last of the Mohicans*, Race Mixing, and America's Destiny.” *Leather-Stocking Redux; or, Old Tales, New Essays*. Ed. Jeffrey Walker. New York: AMS Press, 2011. 33-56.

Badè, William Frederic. *The Life and Letters of John Muir*. 2 Vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924.

Barker, Martin, and Roger Sabin. *The Lasting of the Mohicans: History of an American Myth*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995.

Bates, Craig D. and Marth J. Lee. *Tradition and Innovation: A Basket History of the Indians of the Yosemite-Mono Lake Area*. Yosemite National Park: Yosemite Association, 1990.

Baym, Nina. "English Nature, New York Nature, and *Walden*'s New England Nature." *Transient and Permanent: The Transcendentalist Movement and Its Contexts*. Ed. Charles Capper and Conrad Edick Wright. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1999.

Beesley, David. *Crow's Range: An Environmental History of the Sierra Nevada*. Reno: U of Nevada P, 2004.

Bellin, Joshua David. "Native American Rights." *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism*. Ed. Joel Myerson, Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, Laura Dassow Walls. New York: Oxford UP, 2010.

Bergland, Renée L. *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*. Hanover, NH: UP of New England, 1999.

Berkhofer Jr., Robert F. *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Blair, John G. and Augustus Trowbridge. "Thoreau on Katahdin." *American Quarterly* 12.4 (1960): 508-517.

Blakemore, Steven, and Jon Noble. "Whitman and 'The Indian Problem': The Texts and Contexts of 'Song of the Redwood-Tree.'" *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 22.2

(2004): 108-125.

Branch, Michael P. “Ralph Waldo Emerson.” *American Nature Writers*. Vol. 1. Ed. John Elder. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1996.

---. “Telling Nature's Story: John Muir and the Decentering of the Romantic Self.” *John Muir in Historical Perspective*. Ed. Sally M. Miller. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1999. 99-122.

---. “John Muir’s My First Summer in the Serra (1911).” *ISLE* 11.1 (2004): 139-152.

Bradford, William. *Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647*. Ed. Samuel Eliot Morison. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959.

Brantlinger, Patrick. *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003.

Braun, Bruce. “‘On the Raggedy Edge of Risk’: Articulations of Race and Nature after Biology.” *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference*. Ed. Donald S. Moore, Jake Kosek, and Anand Pandian. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. 175-203.

Brentin Mock. “Are There Two Different Versions of Environmentalism, one ‘white’,” one ‘black’? ” grist.org. 31 Jul. 2014. Web. 10 Oct. 2017.

Bridgman, Richard. *Dark Thoreau*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1982.

Brooks, Paul. *Speaking for Nature: How Literary Naturalists from Henry Thoreau to Rachel Carson Have Shaped America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980.

Brown, Harry J. *Injun Joe's Ghost: The Indian Mixed-Blood in American Writing*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2004.

Brown, Kathleen M. *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2009.

Bryant, William Cullen. *The Poetical Works of William Cullen Bryant*. 2 Vols. Ed. Parke

Godwin. New York: Russell & Russell, 1967.

Buell, Lawrence. *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1973.

---. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1995.

---. "Henry David Thoreau." *American Nature Writers*. Vol. 2. Ed. John Elder. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1996.

---. *Emerson*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap P of Harvard UP, 2003.

---. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005.

Bunnell, Lafayette Houghton. *Discovery of the Yosemite and the Indian War of 1851 Which Led to That Event*. 1911. Yosemite National Park: Yosemite Association, 1990.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*. 1759. Ed. David Womersley. New York: Penguin Books, 1998.

Burkholder, Robert E. "Nature Writing and Environmental Activism." *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism*. Ed. Joel Myerson, Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, Laura Dassow Walls. New York: Oxford UP, 2010.

Carroll, Peter N. *Puritanism and the Wilderness: The Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier, 1629-1700*. New York: Columbia UP, 1969.

Catlin, George. *North American Indians*. 1841. New York: Penguin, 1989.

Cella, Matthew J. C. *Bad Land Pastoralism in Great Plains Fiction*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2010.

Chase, Richard. *The American Novel and Its Tradition*. 1957. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins

UP, 1980.

Cheyfitz, Eric. “Savage Law: The Plot Against American Indians in *Johnson and Graham’s Lessee v. M’Intosh* and *The Pioneers*.” *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. Ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.

Chen, Zhang-fang. *Thoreau and China*. Taipei: San Min Publishes, 1991.

Clark, Leadie M. *Walt Whitman’s Concept of the American Common Man*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1955.

Clark, Robert. *History and Myth in American Fiction, 1823-52*. New York: St. Martin's, 1984.

Cleaver, Eldridge. “The Land Question and Black Liberation.” *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*. Ed. Robert Scheer. New York: Random House, 1969.

Cohen, Michael P. *The Pathless Way: John Muir and American Wilderness*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1984.

Cook-Lynn, Elizabeth. *Why I Can’t Read Wallace Stegner and Other Essays*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1996.

Cooper, James Fenimore. *Notions of the Americans: Picked Up by a Traveling Bachelor*. 1828. Ed. Gary Williams. Albany: State U of New York P, 1991.

---. *The Last of the Mohicans*. 1826. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.

---. “Introduction.” 1831. *The Last of the Mohicans*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.

---. *The Pioneers*. 1823. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

---. “Preface to the Leatherstocking Tales.” 1850. *The Pioneers*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. 457-461.

---. *The Prairie*. 1827. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

---. “Introduction.” 1832. *The Prairie*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

---. “Introduction.” 1849. *The Prairie*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

Cotton, John. “God’s Promise to His Plantations.” 1630. *Colonial American Writing*. Ed. Roy Harvey Pearce. New York: Holt, 1969.

Cronon, William. “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.” *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. Ed. William Cronon. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996.

---. “The Riddle of the Apostle Islands: How Do You Manage a Wilderness Full of Human Stories?” (2003). *The Wilderness Debate Rages On*. Ed. Michael P. Nelson and J. Baird Callicott. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 2008. 632-644.

Dallal, Jenine Abboushi. “American Imperialism UnManifest: Emerson’s ‘Inquest’ and Cultural Regeneration.” *American Literature* 73.1 (2001): 47-83.

Daly, Robert. “Introduction.” *The Pioneers*. Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011.

DeLuca, Kevin. “In the Shadow of Whiteness: The Consequences of Constructions of Nature in Environmental Politics.” *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity*. Ed. Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith N. Martin. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999.

DeLuca, Kevin, and Anne Demo. “Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race: Carleton Watkins, John Muir, and the Construction of the Wilderness.” *Environmental History* 6.4 (2001): 541-560.

Derounian-Stodola, Kathryn Zabelle, and James Arthur Levernier. *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900*. NY: Twayne Publishers, 1993.

Dorman, Robert L. *A World for Nature: Four Pioneering Environmental Advocates, 1845-1913*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1998.

Dowie, Mark. *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict Between Global Conservation and Native Peoples*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2009.

Duane, Daniel. "Goodbye, Yosemite. Hello, What?" nytimes.com. 2 Sept. 2017. Web. 1 Nov. 2017.

Dunbar, Paul Laurence. "The Haunted Oak." *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry*. Ed. Camille T. Dungy. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2009.

Elder, John C. "John Muir and the Literature of Wilderness." *The Massachusetts Review* 22.2 (1981): 375-86.

Ellingson, Ter. *The Myth of the Noble Savage*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2001.

Elliott, Emory. *The Cambridge Introduction to Early American Literature*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2002.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. 12 Vols. Ed. Edward Waldo Emerson. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904. Abbreviated as CW.

---. *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. 16 Vols. Ed. William H. Gilman. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1965. Abbreviated as JMN.

Erkkila, Betsy. *Whitman: The Political Poet*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.

---. "Whitman and American Empire." *Walt Whitman of Mickle Street: A Centennial Collection*. Ed. Geoffrey M. Sill. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1994. 54-69.

Evans, Mei Mei. "Nature and Environmental Justice." *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*. Ed. Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2002.

Fink, Steven. *Prophet in the Marketplace: Thoreau's Development as a Professional*

Writer. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992.

Finley, James S. "'*Who* Are We? *Where* Are We?': Contact and Literary Navigation in The Maine Woods." *ISLE* 19.2 (2012): 336-355.

Finney, Carolyn. *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2014.

Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. "Seeing Absence, Evoking Presence: History and the Art of Zhi Lin." *Zhi Lin: In Search of the Lost History of Chinese Migrants and the Transcontinental Railroads*. Tacoma: Tacoma Art Museum, 2017. 31-48.

Fleck, Richard F. *Henry Thoreau and John Muir Among the Native Americans*. Portland, OR: Westwinds Press, 1985.

Folsom, Ed. "Approaches and Removals: W. S. Merwin's Encounter with Whitman's America." *Shenandoah* 29.3 (1978): 57-73.

---. "Culturing White Anxiety: Walt Whitman and American Indians." *Etudes Anglaises: Grande-Bretagne, Stats-Unis* 45.3 (1992): 287-98.

---. *Walt Whitman's Native Representations*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1994.

Fox, Stephen. *John Muir and His Legacy: The American Conservation Movement*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1981.

Frost, Linda. "'The Red Face of Man': The Penobscot Indian and a Conflict of Interest in Thoreau's *Maine Woods*." *ESQ* 39.1 (1993): 20-47.

Fussell, Edwin. *Frontier: American Literature and the American West: American Literature and the American West*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1965.

Gadgil, Madhav, and Ramachandra Guha. *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Garvey, T. Gregory. "Mediating Citizenship: Emerson, The Cherokee Removals, and the

Rhetoric of Nationalism." *The Centennial Review* 41.3 (1997): 461-469.

Gatta, John. "Cleanliness Writ Large in John Muir's Sierra." *Religion & Literature* 35.2/3 (2003): 11-28.

Gee, Alison Singh. "Beyond Gold Mountain: Yosemite's Chinese American History." sierraclub.org. 28 Feb. 2018. Web. 16 Apr. 2018.

Gilmore, Paul. *The Genuine Article: Race, Mass Culture, and American Literary Manhood*. Durham: Duke UP, 2001.

Gonnaud, Maurice. *An Uneasy Solitude: Individual and Society in the Work of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Trans. Lawrence Rosenwald. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987.

Gordimer, Nadine. "The Ultimate Safari." *Telling Tales*. Ed. Nadine Gordimer. New York: Picador, 2004.

Gougeon, Len. "Historical Background." *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*. Ed. Len Gougeon and Joel Myerson. New Haven: Yale UP, 1995.

Green, Michael. "Images of Native Americans in Advertising: Some Moral Issues." *Journal of Business Ethics* 12 (1993): 323-330.

Greenfield, Bruce. "Thoreau's Discovery of America: A Nineteenth-Century First Contact." *ESQ* 32.2 (1986): 81-95.

Grünzweig, Walter. "Noble ethics and Loving Aggressiveness: The Imperialist Walt Whitman." *An American Empires: Expansionist Cultures and Policies, 1881-1917*. Ed. Serge Ricard. Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1990. 151-65.

Guha, Ramachandra. "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique" (1989). *The Great New Wilderness Debate*. Ed. J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson. Athens, Georgia: U of Georgia P, 1998.

Gura, Philip F. *American Transcendentalism: A History*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2007.

---. “Nature Writing.” *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism*. Ed. Joel Myerson, Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, Laura Dassow Walls. New York: Oxford UP, 2010.

Haberly, David T. “Women and Indians: *The Last of the Mohicans* and the Captivity Tradition.” *American Quarterly* 28.4 (1976): 431-444.

Hansen, Arlen J. “Right Men in the Right Places: The Meeting of Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Muir.” *Western Humanities Review* 39.2 (1985): 165-72.

Harding, Wendy. *The Myth of Emptiness and the New American Literature of Place*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2014.

Hitt, Christopher. “Toward an Ecological Sublime.” *New Literary History* 30.3 (1999): 603-623.

Hixson, Walter L. *American Settler Colonialism: A History*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.

Hoag, Ronald Wesley. “The Mark of Wilderness: Thoreau’s Contact with Ktaadn.” *Texas Studies in Literature & Language* 24.1 (1982): 23-46.

Hoagland, Edward. “Introduction.” *The Maine Woods*. New York: Penguin, 1988.

Howe, Daniel Walker. *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*. New York: Oxford UP, 2007.

Huxley, Julian. *The Conservation of Wild Life and Natural Habitats in Central and East Africa*. New York: UNESCO, 1961.

Iovino, Serenella, and Serpil Oppermann. “Introduction.” *Material Ecocriticism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2014.

Jacoby, Karl. “Ken Burns Gone Wild: Naturalizing the Nation in *The National Parks: America’s Best Idea*.” *The Public Historian* 33.2 (2011): 19-23.

Jennings, Francis. *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of*

Conquest. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975.

Johnson, Cassandra Y. and J. M. Bowker. “African-American Wildland Memories” (2004). *The Wilderness Debate Rages On*. Ed. Michael P. Nelson and J. Baird Callicott. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 2008.

Johnson, Rochelle L. P*assions for Nature: Nineteenth-Century America's Aesthetics of Alienation*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2009.

Johnson, Shelton. “Reclaiming the Wilderness.” earthisland.org. 2012. Web. 10 Nov. 2017.

Johnston, Anna, and Alan Lawson. “Settler Colonies.” *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. Ed. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005.

Kant, Immanuel. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. Trans. John T. Goldthwait. Berkeley: U of California P, 1960. Abbreviated as *OFBS*.

---. *Critique of Judgement*. 1790. Trans. James Creed Meredith. Ed. Nicholas Walker. New York: Oxford UP, 2008. Abbreviated as *CJ*.

Kaplan, Amy. “Introduction: ‘Left Alone with America’: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture.” *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. Ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.

Keiter, Robert B. *To Conserve Unimpaired: The Evolution of the National Park Idea*. Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2013.

Killingsworth, M. Jimmie. “The Voluptuous Earth and the Fall of the Redwood Tree: Whitman’s Personifications of Nature.” *Whitman East & West: New Contexts for Reading Walt Whitman*. Ed. Ed Folsom. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2002.

---. *Walt Whitman and the Earth: A Study in Ecopoetics*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2004.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *China Men*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

Klotz, Sarah. “The Red Man Has Left No Mark Here: Graves and Land Claim in the Cooperian Tradition.” *ESQ* 60.3 (2014): 331-369.

Kolodny, Annette. *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1975.

---. “A Summary History of the Penobscot Nation.” *The Life and Traditions of the Red Man: A rediscovered treasure of Native American literature*. 1893. Ed. Annette Kolodny. Durham: Duke UP, 2007.

Kucich, John J. “Lost in the Maine Woods: Henry David Thoreau, Joseph Nicolar, and the Penobscot World.” *The Concord Saunterer* 19/20 (2011-12): 22-52.

Kurant, Wendy. “’Strange Fascination’: Walt Whitman, Imperialism, and the South.” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 29.3 (2012): 81-95.

Lawrence, D. H. *Studies in Classic American Literature*. 1923. New York: Penguin Books, 1977.

Lee, Erika, and Judy Yung. *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2010.

Lemire, Elise Virginia. *“Miscegenation”: Making Race in America*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2002.

Lifton, Frederick C. “Henry Thoreau’s Cult(ivation) of Nature: American Landscape and American Self in ‘Ktaadn’ and ‘Walking.’” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 12.1 (1998): 67-86.

Limerick, Patricia. “Disorientation and Reorientation: The American Landscape Discovered from the West.” *The Journal of American History* 79.3 (1992): 1021-1049.

Long, Robert Emmet. *James Fenimore Cooper*. New York: Continuum, 1990.

Love, Eric. *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2004.

Lyon, Thomas J. "John Muir." *American Nature Writers*. Vol. 2. Ed. John Elder. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1996.

Maddox, Lucy. *Removals: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.

Mann, Charles C. *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus*. New York: Vintage Books, 2006.

Mapp, Rue. "Wilderness at 50: Our Wild and Civil Rights." orionmagazine.org. 15 Sept. 2014. Web. 10 Nov. 2017.

Marshall, Ian. *Story Line: Exploring the Literature of the Appalachian Trail*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1998.

Mather, Cotton. *The Wonders of the Invisible World*. London: John Russell Smith, 1862.

Mazel, David. *American Literary Environmentalism*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 2000.

McIntosh, James. *Thoreau as Romantic Naturalist: His Shifting Stance toward Nature*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1974.

McKusick, James. "From Coleridge to John Muir: The Romantic Origins of Environmentalism." *The Wordsworth Circle* 26.1 (1995): 36-40.

Mckusick, James C. *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

McWilliams, John P. *Political Justice in A Republic: James Fenimore Cooper's America*. Berkeley: U. of California P, 1972.

---. *The Last of the Mohicans: Civil Savagery and Savage Civility*. New York: Twayne

Publishers, 1995.

---. “Introduction.” *The Last of the Mohicans*. New York, Oxford UP, 1998a.

---. “The Historical Contexts of *The Last of the Mohicans*.” *The Last of the Mohicans.* New York, Oxford UP, 1998b.

Meacham, Jon. “From Treaties to the Trail.” *Time: Special Edition* 2017: 62-67.

Merchant, Carolyn. *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture*. NY: Routledge, 2003a.

---. “Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History.” *Environmental History* 8.3 (2003b): 380-394.

---. *American Environmental History*. New York: Columbia UP, 2007.

Merwin, W. S. *Regions of Memory: Uncollected Prose, 1949-1982*. Ed. Ed Folsom and Cary Nelson. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1987.

Mielke, Laura L. *Moving Encounters: Sympathy and the Indian Question in Antebellum Literature*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2008.

Miller, Angela L. “The Fate of Wilderness in American Landscape Art: The Dilemmas of Nature’s Nation.” *American Wilderness: A New History*. Ed. Michael Lewis. New York: Oxford UP, 2007. 91-112

---, et al. *American Encounters: Art, History, and Cultural Identity*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2008.

Mnassar, Sabri. “Competing Environmental Ethics in Cooper’s *The Pioneers*.” *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 6.2 (2015): 78-86.

Mock, Brentin. “Are There Two Different Versions of Environmentalism, One ‘White’,” One ‘Black’?” grist.org. 31 Jul. 2014. Web. 10 Oct. 2017.

Momaday, N. Scott. “The Morality of Indian Hating.” *The Man Made of Words: Essays,*

Stories, Passages. NY: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Muir, John. *Letters to a Friend, Written to Mrs. Ezra S. Carr, 1866-1879*. 1915. Dunwoody, GA: N. S. Berg, 1973. Abbreviated as *LF*.

---. *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*. Ed. Linnie Marsh Wolfe. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1979. Abbreviated as *JM*.

---. "Our National Parks." 1901. *John Muir: The Eight Wilderness-Discovery Books*. Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1995. 455-605. Abbreviated as *ONP*.

---. "A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf." 1916. *John Muir: The Eight Wilderness-Discovery Books*. Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1995. 119-183. Abbreviated as *ATM*.

---. "The Story of My Boyhood and Youth." 1913. *John Muir: The Eight Wilderness-Discovery Books*. Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1995. 21-111. Abbreviated as *SMBY*.

---. *John Muir: His Life and Letters and Other Writings*. Ed. Terry Gifford. Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1996. Abbreviated as *HLLOW*.

---. *The Mountains of California*. 1894. New York: The Modern Library, 2001. Abbreviated as *MC*.

---. *My First Summer in the Sierra*. 1911. New York: The Modern Library, 2003. Abbreviated as *MFS*.

---. *The Yosemite*. 1912. New York: The Modern Library, 2003. Abbreviated as *Y*.

Myers, Jeffrey. *Converging Stories: Race, Ecology, and Environmental Justice in American Literatur*e. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 2005.

Nash, Roderick Frazier. "The American Invention of National Parks." *American Quarterly* 22.3 (1970): 726-735.

---. *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989.

---. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. 1967. New Haven: Yale UP, 2001.

Neff, John W. *Katahdin: An Historic Journey*. Boston: Appalachian Mountain Club Books, 2006.

Nelson, Robert H. “Environmental Colonialism: ‘Saving’ Africa from Africans.” *The Independent Review* 8.1 (2003): 65-86.

Newlin, Paul A. “The Prairie and *The Prairies*: Cooper's and Bryant's Views of Manifest Destiny.” *William Cullen Bryant and His America: Centennial Conference Proceedings, 1878-1978*. Ed. Stanley Brodwin, Michael D'Innocenzo, Joseph G. Astman. New York: AMS Press, 1983.

Newman, Lance. “Environmentalist Thought and Action.” *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism*. Ed. Joel Myerson, Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, Laura Dassow Walls. New York: Oxford UP, 2010.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2011.

Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years A Slave*. 1853. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Kevin M. Burke. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017.

O’Brien, Jean M. *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010.

O’Brien, William E. and Wairimu Ngaruiya Njambi. “Marginal Voices in ‘Wild’ America: Race, Ethnicity, Gender and ‘Nature’ in The National Parks.” *The Journal of American Culture* 35.1 (2012): 15-25.

Oelschlaeger, Max. *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1991.

Oravec, Christine. “John Muir, Yosemite, and the Sublime Response: A Study in the Rhetoric of Preservationism.” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 67 (1981): 245-58.

Ortiz, Simon J. *Woven Stone*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1992.

Outka, Paul. *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Överland, Orm. *The Making and Meaning of an American Classic: James Fenimore Cooper's The Prairie*. New York: Humanities Press, 1973.

Owens, Louis. *Wolfsong*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1995.

Papa, James A. Jr. “Reinterpreting Myths: The Wilderness and the Indian in Thoreau’s Maine Woods.” *The Midwest Quarterly* 40.2 (1999): 215-227.

Paryz, Marek. *The Postcolonial and Imperial Experience in American Transcendentalism*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.

Payne, Daniel G. *Voices in the Wilderness: American Nature Writing and Environmental Politics*. Hanover: UP of New England, 1996.

Pearce, Roy Harvey. *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*. 1953. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.

Pease, Donald E. *The New American Exceptionalism*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2009.

Perreault, Melanie. “American Wilderness and First Contact.” *American Wilderness: A New History*. Ed. Michael Lewis. New York: Oxford UP, 2007.

Philippon, Daniel J. *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2005.

Plourde, Bruce. “Thoreau’s Wooded Polis: Boundaries in The Maine Woods.” *Literature, Writing, and the Natural World*. Ed. James Guignard, T. P. Murphy. Newcastle upon

Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars, 2009. 33-47.

Porter, Joy. *Native American Environmentalism: Land, Spirit, and the Idea of Wilderness*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2014.

Poulsen, Richard C. *The Landscape of the Mind: Cultural Transformations of the American West*. NY: Peter Lang, 1992.

Powici, Christ. "What is Wilderness?: John Muir and the Question of the Wild." *Scottish Studies Review* 5.1 (2004): 74-86.

Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Purdy, Jedediah. *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2015.

---. "Environmentalism's Racist History." newyorker.com 13 Aug. 2015. Web. 17 Apr. 2018.

Rans, Geoffrey. *Cooper's Leather-Stocking Novels: A Secular Reading*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1991.

Richardson, Robert D., Jr. *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1986.

---. *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995.

Ringe, Donald A. *James Fenimore Cooper*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988a.

---. "Introduction." *The Pioneers*. New York: Penguin Books, 1988b.

---. "Introduction." *The Prairie*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

Robinson, David M. *Natural Life: Thoreau's Worldly Transcendentalism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004.

---. "Introduction: Emerson as a Political Thinker." *The Political Emerson: Essential*

Writings on Politics and Social Reform. Ed. David M. Robinson. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.

Rosenthal, Debra J. *Race Mixture in Nineteenth-Century U.S. and Spanish American Fictions Gender, Culture, and Nation Building*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2004.

Rossi, William. "Thoreau and Native Americans." *The American Nature Writing Newsletter* 6.2 (1994): 11-12.

Rothenberg, David. *Wild Ideas*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995.

Rowe, John Carlos. *Literary Culture and U.S Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Rowlandson, Mary. "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God." *Puritans Among the Indians: Accounts of Captivity and Redemption 1676-1724*. Ed. Alden T. Vaughan & Edward W. Clark. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1981.

Runte, Alfred. *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1990.

Saranillio, Dean Itsuji. "Settler Colonialism." *Native Studies Keywords*. Ed. Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, Michelle Raheja. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2015.

Sayre, Robert F. *Thoreau and the American Indians*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977.

Schachterle, Lance. "On *The Prairie*." *Leather-Stocking Redux; Or, Old Tales, New Essays*. Ed. Jeffrey Walker. NY: AMS Press, 2011.

Scheckel, Susan. "'In the Land of His Fathers': Cooper, Land Rights, and the Legitimation of American National Identity." *James Fenimore Cooper: New Historical and Literary Contexts*. Ed. W. M. Verhoeven. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993. 125-150.

---. *The Insistence of the Indian: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century American*

Culture. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998.

Scheese, Don. *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996.

Schramm, Karen. "The 'Devil's Territories' or the "Preservation of the World"?: Thoreau's Subversion of Puritan Wilderness Discourse." *Finding Colonial Americas: Essays Honoring J. A. Leo Lemay*. Ed. Carla Mulford and David S. Shields. Newark, DE: U of Delaware P, 2001.

Sivils, Matthew Wynn. "Doctor Bat's Ass: Buffon, American Degeneracy, and Cooper's *The Prairie*." *Western American Literature* 44.4 (2010): 342-361.

Slotkin, Richard. "Introduction to the 1831 Edition." *The Last of the Mohicans*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.

---. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992.

---. *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1994.

---. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860.* 1973. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2000.

Smith, Henry Nash. "Introduction." *The Prairie*. New York : Rinehart, 1950.

---. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. 1950. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1973.

---. "Symbol and Idea in *Virgin Land*." *Ideology and Classic American Literature*. Ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen. New York: Cambridge UP, 1986.

Smith, Herbert F. *John Muir*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965.

Snyder, Gary. *The Gary Snyder Reader: Prose, Poetry and Translations, 1952-1998.*

Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2000.

Solnit, Rebecca. *Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Landscape Wars of the American West*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Spence, Mark David. "Dispossessing the Wilderness: Yosemite Indians and the National Park Ideal, 1864-1930." *Pacific Historical Review* 65.1 (1996): 27-59.

---. *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

Standing Bear, Luther. *Land of the Spotted Eagle*. 1933. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1978.

Stegner, Wallace. "The Best Idea We Ever Had." *Marking the Sparrow's Fall: The Making of the American West*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998.

Stowe, William W. "Transcendental Vacations: Thoreau and Emerson in the Wilderness." *The New England Quarterly* 83.3 (2010): 482-507.

Sundquist, Eric J. *Home as Found: Authority and Genealogy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979.

Tallmadge, John. "'Ktaadn': Thoreau in the Wilderness of Words." *ESQ* 31.3 (1985): 137-48.

---. "John Muir and the Poetics of Natural Conversion." *North Dakota Quarterly* 59.2 (1991): 62-79.

Taylor, Alan. *William Cooper's Town*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1995.

Taylor, Bob Pepperman. *America's Bachelor Uncle: Thoreau and the American Polity*. Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1996.

Theroux, Paul "Introduction." *The Maine Woods*. Ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004.

Thomas, M. Wynn. *The Lunar Light of Whitman's Poetry*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP,

1987.

Thoreau, Henry David. *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*. 14 Vols. Ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949. Abbreviated as J.

---. *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*. Ed. Walter Harding and Carl Bode. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974. Abbreviated as C.

---. *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau: Journal*. Ed. John C. Broderick. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981. Abbreviated as WJ.

---. *The Maine Woods*. 1864. New York: Penguin, 1988.

Tichi, Cecelia. *New World, New Earth: Environmental Reform in American Literature from the Puritans through Whitman*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. Ed. Issac Kramnick. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007.

Traubel, Horace. *With Walt Whitman in Camden*. 5 Vols. New York: M. Kennerley, 1915.

Turner, James Morton. "Rethinking American Exceptionalism: Toward a Transnational History of National Parks, Wilderness, and Protected Areas." *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental History*. Ed. Andrew C. Isenberg. New York: Oxford UP, 2014.

Vecsey, Christopher. "American Indian Environmental Religion." *American Indian Environments: Ecological Issues in Native American History*. Eds. Christopher Vecsey and Robert W. Venables. NY: Syracuse UP, 1980.

Wallace, James D. "Introduction." *The Pioneers*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

Walls, Laura Dassow. *Emerson's Life in Science: The Culture of Truth*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003.

---. *Henry David Thoreau: A Life*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2017.

Wardrop, Stephanie. "Last of the Red Hot Mohicans: Miscegenation in the Popular

American Romance." *MELUS* 22.2 (1997): 61-74.

Weaver, John C. *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650-1900*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2003.

Weiskel, Thomas. *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.

White, Craig. *Student Companion to James Fenimore Cooper.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006.

White, Richard. "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature." *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. Ed. William Cronon. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996.

Whitley, Edward. "'The First White Aboriginal': Walt Whitman and John Rollin Ridge." *ESQ* 52.1/2 (2006): 105-139.

Whitman, Walt. *The Gathering of the Forces*. Ed. Cleveland Rodgers and John Black. 2 Vols. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1920.

---. *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*. New York: The Library of America, 1982. Abbreviated as *CPCP*.

---. *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*. Ed. Edward F. Grier. 6 Vols. New York: New York UP, 1984.

---. *An American Primer by Walt Whitman*. 1904. Ed. Horace Traubel. Stevens Point, WI: Holy Cow! Press, 1987.

Wilkins, Thurman. *Cherokee Tragedy: The Ridge Family and the Decimation of a People*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1986.

Williams, Dennis C. *God's Wilds: John Muir's Vision of Nature*. College Station: Texas A&M UP, 2002.

Wolfe, Linnie Marsh. *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir*. 1945. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1978.

Wong, Shawn. "In This Place History Is Retrieved." *Zhi Lin: In Search of the Lost History of Chinese Migrants and the Transcontinental Railroads*. Tacoma: Tacoma Art Museum, 2017. 19-29.

Worster, Donald. *Nature's Economy: The Roots of Ecology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977.

---. *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir*. New York: Oxford UP, 2008.

Wu, Ming-yi. *Liberate Nature by Writing: Exploration in Modern Nature Writing of Taiwan, 1980-2002*. Taipei: Da An Publishers, 2004.

Xu, Ren-xiu. *The Monsoon Forest of Monkeys*. Taipei: Yuan Liu Publishers, 1990.

Young, Terrence. "'A Contradiction in Democratic Government': W. J. Trent, Jr., and the Struggle to Desegregate National Park Campgrounds." *Environmental History* 14 (2009): 651-82.

Zhu, Li-min. *American Literature 1607-1860*. Taipei: Taiwan United Publishers, 1963.

Zhu, Yan. *A Collection of Essays on American Literature*. Taipei: Lian Jing Publishers, 1976.

Zimring, Carl A. *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States*. New York: New York UP, 2015.