Chapter VI

Agrarianism, Expansionism, and the Myth of the American West

1. WHY THE WEST?

> America only more so.
> NEIL CAMPBELL, *THE RHIZOMATIC WEST*

> [The] West is a country in the mind, and so eternal.
> ARCHIBALD MACLEISH

> Can the West be heard?
> WALTER PRESCOTT WEBB

The American West has captured the imagination of Americans and Americanists alike. It has been foundational for multi-disciplinary American studies scholarship since Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893 identified the frontier as the most decisive factor in shaping American political and social institutions and in creating a specifically American national character (cf. "Significance"). Shifting the focus away from America's European heritage and divisions between the North and the South, Turner's frontier thesis argued for studying America from an East/West perspective that inaugurated an exceptionalist discourse based on experiences of and with the land. At the time it was not entirely well received by his fellow historians and has been contested from various perspectives and by various groups throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, yet it has provided a host of resonant images for the American cultural imaginary, and has been highly influential in the study of American history, culture, and literature. It is thus no coincidence that one of the earliest classics of American studies scholarship, Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, has

lent its name to the first generation of Americanists: the Myth and Symbol School (cf. the introduction to this book). The construction and affirmation of the West in Turner and Smith already conveys many of the aspects of the myth of the West to be considered in this chapter: first of all, the American West is often viewed not so much as a region or an area than as a space of transition that does not necessarily have a precise geographical location, but rather changes with Euro-American settlement expanding westward. Second, the West as a transformative space has often been considered as a *pars pro toto* for the nation and as a special place from which its future could be built, making "the discovery, conquest, and settlement of the West […] the dominant theme of American history" (Slotkin, "Unit Pride" 472). As part of a "homogenized national geography" (Lopez, "American Geographies" 136) and as a "nationalist West" (Dorman, *Hell* xii), it has been a locus, however vaguely defined, for developing epic cultural scripts of Americanness. Third, the West as a region – defined e.g. as the "17 coterminous states located on and westward of the 100th meridian" (ibid. xii) – is connected to visions of an agrarian ideal that for a long time has been seen as standing for authentic Americanness, but also, from a more critical perspective, for an "enduring provincial mentality" (Von Frank, *Sacred Game* 5). Pitting the rural West against the newly emerging urban centers in the East in the 19th century has shaped a whole range of dichotomies that are still at work today and that have been described as the country vs. the city (cf. Williams, *Country*) or the frontier vs. the metropolis (cf. Slotkin, *Fatal Environment* 35). Thus, the myth of the West also reflects a rural ideal that grows out of a conception of the United States as predominantly rural or as having a distinct rural past. Fourth, the attributes often given to the West reflect a number of implications regarding a particular way of life, which may be associated with notions of the pre- or anti-modern, traditionalism, folk culture, and specific cultural codes and idioms: "The West, at bottom, is a form of society rather than an area," Hofstadter notes quoting Turner ("Thesis Disputed" 102). Lastly, the myth of the West includes a pastoral dimension; by adapting a much older European pastoral discourse to the US-American context, Leo Marx has theorized the pastoral as the middle ground between the city and the 'wilderness' and as a vehicle for social critique (cf. *Machine*). Even if the myth of the West is organized around certain recurring (stock) characters (farmers, cowboys, 'Indians'), it is not focused on people, but on "[t]he land itself" (Fox, *Void* 130).

Illustration 1: The West as Symbol and Myth

Ben Shahn, cover design for *Virgin Land* (1957; Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Imaging Department). © President and Fellows of Harvard College

The agrarian myth of the West and the myth of the frontier can be traced back to the beginning of European settlement in North America in the 17th and 18th centuries, and connects to narratives of chosenness (cf. chapter 3) and the melting pot (cf. chapter 5). The frontier may well be considered "the longest-lived of American myths" (Slotkin, *Fatal Environment* 15); its scholarly treatment by Turner followed the so-called second founding of the US during Reconstruction, when "the unitary American nation became a primary focus of ideology and power" (Slotkin, "Unit Pride" 472), and the US Census Bureau's declaration in 1890 that there no longer was a frontier. The rise of the US to world power went along with the interpretation of westward expansion and settlement as an integral part of that process and as "a westward creation story" (Campbell, *Rhizomatic West* 2). As the hub of this national cosmology, the frontier myth has been the object of much critical attention – most notably from Richard Slotkin, who is the author of three singularly important critical monographs on the frontier myth (*Regeneration through Violence*, *The Fatal Environment*, and *Gunfighter Nation*).

My discussion of the American West will focus on agrarianism and expansionism as two basic tenets in cultural history and the cultural imaginary. For one thing, I will address the West as a space of residence and settlement that is often imagined as a kind of garden or even Edenic paradise symbolizing pastoral simplicity and economic independence based on subsistence farming. This semi-'civilized,' "domesticated West" (Smith, *Virgin Land* 138) is imagined in popular culture, for instance, in Laura Ingalls Wilder's book *Little House on the Prairie* and the television series of the same title that was adapted from it, and in the lyrics of contemporary country music. Second, the American West is constructed as a site of individual and collective quests for land and dominance. Violent conflict between settlers and Native Americans often is the focus of narratives that represent the West as a still 'uncivilized' space yet to be conquered and controlled, as is the case e.g. in classical Westerns. It is useful to distinguish between the two versions of the West as peaceful garden (agrarianism) and as conflicted frontier (expansionism), even if, of course, both versions overlap in most representations: a Western may e.g. tell the story of a farmer and his family (agrarian version of the West) but may for their protection enlist the masculinist, individualist, classical Western hero (expansionist version). The Western may also present the second as a precondition for the first, or use images of the agrarian West to legitimize the violence that is at the heart of expansionism. We may thus think of them as sequentially connected, yet not in any straightforward way. As David Wrobel has pointed out, "[t]he two sentiments, the hope for a postfrontier future in the West, followed later by a longing for the frontier past, have played an important part in the formation of western identities" (*Promised Lands* 1) – and of US national identity, one should add. It is the cultural work of the myth that apparently has neutralized these contradictions and paradoxes of the West.

In this chapter, I will address both versions of the mythical West separately, but also show how they interconnect. The figure of the American farmer as 'American Adam' and the rural, agrarian myth as found in the canonical writings of Thomas Jefferson and J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur will serve as my point of departure. Second, I will focus on the concept of the frontier and notions of expansionism and manifest destiny. Revisionist approaches have contested the rather idyllic and often one-sided images in these two conceptualizations of the West, third, from a gender perspective, and fourth, from an ethnic (more specifically, Japanese American) perspective. Fifth, I will look at popular culture that has represented and affirmed the myth of the West by developing and using the formula of the Western. Sixth, using the war in Southeast Asia popularly known as the Vietnam War as an example, I will point to the role and symbolic power

of the frontier myth in political rhetoric and political culture. Last but not least, I will point to the West in discourses of transnationalism and globalization, as the American West has become a preeminent symbol of exceptionalist 'Americanness' around the world.

2. THE AGRARIAN WEST: THE AMERICAN FARMER AND THE GARDEN MYTH IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC AND BEYOND

> The United States was born in the country.
> RICHARD HOFSTADTER

> No Easterner, born forlornly within the sphere of New York, Boston, or Philadelphia, can pass very far beyond the Alleghenies without feeling that American civilization is here found in the full tide of believing in itself. The flat countryside looks more ordered, more farmlike; the Main Streets that flash by the car-windows somehow look more robust and communal.
> RANDOLPH S. BOURNE, "A MIRROR OF THE MIDDLE WEST"

One of the most canonical definitions of the agrarian myth can be found in Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform*:

> The American mind was raised upon a sentimental attachment to rural living and upon a series of notions about rural people and rural life that I have chosen to designate as the agrarian myth. The agrarian myth represents a kind of homage that Americans have paid to the fancied innocence of their origins. Like any complex of ideas, the agrarian myth cannot be defined in a phrase, but its component themes form a clear pattern. Its hero was the yeoman farmer, its central conception the notion that he is the ideal man and the ideal citizen. (23)

Hofstadter identifies this myth as an initially "elitist," "literary notion" (expressed, for instance, in Walt Whitman's "O Pioneers") which later turned into a "mass creed" (ibid. 25, 28). We find manifestations of it in writings of the early republic and the 19th century, and increasingly nostalgic ones in 20th-century and contemporary literature and popular culture. Among the early proponents of this myth were a Virginian slaveholder and a French immigrant: Thomas Jefferson and Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. In *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), Jefferson envisions the United States as a republic of self-determined, autonomous, and virtuous farmer-citizens, who he juxtaposes as "the chosen people

of God" (135) with the tradesmen and merchants of mercantilist, predominantly urban Europe, which for Jefferson signifies corruption, alienation, and immorality.

Crèvecoeur's writings on the American farmer collectively are more ambivalent than Jefferson's, yet in the passages that have been selectively canonized over the centuries, Crèvecoeur shows a similar enthusiasm for the farmer as a new North American type, and includes himself among this group of husbandmen:

> Some few towns excepted, we are tillers of the earth, from Nova Scotia to West Florida. We are a people of cultivators scattered over an immense territory communicating with each other by means of good roads and navigable rivers, united by the silken bands of mild government, all respecting the laws, without dreading their power, because they are equitable […]. [T]hat of a farmer is the only appellation of the rural inhabitants of our country. (*Letters* 40)

Crèvecoeur's description of European settlers in North America as "farmers" here figures as a democratic form of address ("appellation") that signifies equality and the absence of rank and hierarchy among men in rural America, or what Perry Miller called "nature's nation" (cf. his book of the same title). The logic of the interdependence of land ownership, equality, and republicanism that underlies both Jefferson's as well as Crèvecoeur's version of the agrarian myth is described by Christopher Curtis as follows:

> Grounding republican citizenship in the allodial freehold expressed a belief that the absolute ownership of a tangible piece of property would reconcile the indulgent characteristics of economic individualism with a vested social attachment to a particular local community and, accordingly, foster civic virtue through self-interest. (*Jefferson's Freeholders* 8)

Correlating self-interest, self-sufficiency, and the bond with and loyalty to a local collectivity appears to be rather idealistic of course, and glosses over the by no means inclusive dynamics at work within such communities.

Contextualizing Jefferson and Crèvecoeur as proponents of the agrarian myth necessitates inspecting a number of aspects more closely. As Henry Nash Smith and, more recently, Christopher Curtis have pointed out, Jefferson and Crèvecoeur did not invent this agrarian myth, and were not even all that original in articulating it in late 18th-century America: for one thing, because this kind of rural, pastoral vision dates back to the work of Virgil (70-19 BC) and other

writers of antiquity, and had been part of the colonial imaginary of the 'new world' since the early 17th century (cf. Michael Drayton's "To the Virginian Voyage"); and secondly, because many contemporaries of Jefferson and Crèvecoeur were sharing similar sentiments, as agrarianism was a dominant discourse in the foundational phase of the republic – Jefferson's and Crèvecoeur's texts at the time were by far not the only ones to imagine the US along those lines. Thirdly, with regard to the intended audiences of their writings, we can add that both clearly write in a promotional vein and seek to advertise the United States to a European readership: Their self-fashioning as inhabitants of a new Garden of Eden is part of efforts to legitimize the new republic and to entice more prospective settlers to cross the Atlantic. Jefferson addresses his *Notes* to François Barbé-Marbois, secretary of the French legation to the United States; Crèvecoeur, whose letters were first published in London in 1782, more broadly addresses a wider European readership. In promoting America as the 'Garden of the World,' they thus gave a nationalistic, civil religious dimension to (much) older utopian visions of which they presented North America and more specifically the West as a concrete realization:

> The image of this vast and constantly growing agricultural society in the interior of the continent became one of the dominant symbols of nineteenth-century American society – a collective representation, a poetic idea […] that defined the promise of American life. (Smith, *Virgin Land* 138)

Whereas in texts of the early republic, the agrarian myth is employed to envision America's future as a rural democracy, later references turn increasingly nostalgic regarding a rural social order and way of life. As a fourth aspect, then, rurality in the Jefferson-Crèvecoeur tradition can be considered as increasingly turning into a cherished anachronism. Raymond Williams identifies a similar dynamic of increasing nostalgia for the "rural" as a form of community in Britain (cf. *Country* 102). "Oddly enough," Hofstadter notes, "the agrarian myth came to be believed more widely and tenaciously as it became more fictional" (*Age* 30). In the US, the farmer has remained the emblem of an ethic of hard work, a lifestyle close to nature, and egalitarianism. However, fifthly, Jefferson and Crèvecoeur also reflect different versions of the myth of the West, which can be distinguished into a Northern and Southern version. The Southern imaginary of the West casts the farmer as a plantation owner, and for that reason alone is a far cry from egalitarian dreams; Smith has shown that the literature of the early republic "did not always readily embrace the democratic principles" on which the US was founded by pointing to, among other texts, James Kirke

Paulding's work and the "ingrained class feeling" of his protagonists (*Virgin Land* 160). In the Northern version of the myth on the other hand, the West is usually conceived of as free and as holding the promise of land ownership for everyone, which however does not necessarily mean that it was not exclusivist in regard to class, race, or gender.

While Lincoln's signing into law of the Homestead Act on May 20, 1862 suggested that indeed "the dream of free land had become law" (Hine and Faragher, *American West* 334), the Homestead Act has also been read as nothing more than "a tribute to the high ideal of the yeoman farmer" in the context of a corrupt and inefficient system that facilitated land speculation rather than free settlement and small-scale land acquisition (Limerick, *Legacy* 62). The consequences of the Homestead Act, thus, were not democratic land ownership:

> A further analysis of the data reveals that only 3.653.000 farms in 1900 were operated, even in part, by their owners. But at the same time at least 21.000.000 farm people were tenants and wage laborers and their families on the total of 5.737.000 farms in the nation. These laborers were rarely any better off financially (often worse) than the toiling multitudes in the cities. (Shannon, "Not Even" 44)

Yet, empirical findings can hardly ever successfully contest the validity of myth, as its foundational quality and emotional appeal tend to override minor and major contradictions. Despite the dire consequences that the Homestead Act had for many settlers, the myth of the West remained alive, even if it has not gone uncontested in rural vernacular culture and folklore, as the following folk song from Kansas shows:

> A chattel mortgage in the West
> Is like a cancer on your breast;
> It slowly takes your life away,
> And eats your vitals day by day. (qtd. in Hine and Faragher, *American West* 348)

The song describes the mortgage system not as the promise but as the pathology of the West – a pathology whose effects are like that of a lethal disease for which there is no cure.

Even though the American farm was in many ways not a locus of autonomy and self-sufficiency, as many scholars of the early republic and the 19th century have pointed out (cf. Appleby, *Capitalism*; Limerick, *Legacy* 68; Trachtenberg, *Incorporation* 22-23), the iconography of the farmer and of the farm in the West has been part of national mythmaking that embraces the West as a pastoral idyll,

a democratic space, and as a land of opportunity; to this day, we find notions of America as garden-like and of the American Adam as farmer in cultural productions ranging from historical novels to tobacco commercials. It is mostly the perspective of non-Westerners on the West, as regionalist scholars have noted, from which we perceive the West in terms of harmony, intact communities, and a simple way of life; in many such representations of the West, "we view the region from inside the window of a railroad car" – i.e., as "voyeurs" rather than as residents (Goldman, *Continental Divides* ix). Among others, Randolph Bourne (cf. this section's second epigraph) also attests to the appropriation of the West as a region and as a specific locality and culture for a hegemonic discourse of wholesome Americanness.

In the third decade of the 20th century, however, the agrarian myth of the West underwent an important crisis: in the context of the Great Depression, the American farm was turned into an icon of the rural population's collective suffering in the social documentary photography sponsored by the Resettlement Administration and later the Farm Security Administration; artists such as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and Arthur Rothstein in their photographic representations pointedly critiqued the agrarian myth and pastoral projections on the rural West (cf. Lange, *American Exodus*). More recently, this sense of crisis has prevailed and coexists with discourses that continue to idealize farm life and heroize the farmer. Organizations and initiatives such as the American Farmland Trust, which was founded in 1980, and Farm Aid (inaugurated by Willie Nelson, John Mellencamp, and Neil Young), which since 1985 has raised funds for the preservation and support of family farms in the US through benefit concerts, indicate that the farmer still holds a prominent place in the cultural imaginary. Farm Aid's political engagement also led to the passage by Congress of the Agricultural Credit Act of 1987, which was intended to help small farmers in financial distress. It should be noted, however, that organizations such as Farm Aid "sell authenticity as much as they sell sound land-use policies" (Cook, "Romance" 228), as the lyrics of many singers and bands show (cf. e.g. John Mellencamp's "Rain on the Scarecrow," Shannon Brown's "Corn Fed," or Kenny Chesney's "She Thinks My Tractor's Sexy").

Illustration 2: Against the Agrarian Myth

Arthur Rothstein, *Potato Pickers, Rio Grande County, Colorado* (1939).

In the history of the American West, settlement policies were certainly less invested in egalitarianism than popular representations of pioneers and homesteaders would have us believe, as agrarianism relied on the cheap labor of migrant workers from Asia, slaves and former slaves, poor immigrants from Europe, and, not least, on the expropriation of Native Americans. Thus, popular visions of farming and gardening in the early republic and the 19th century are not as 'innocent' as they may appear at first. For Jefferson, agrarianism and expansionism clearly went hand in hand, as his notion of an "empire of liberty" (cf. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire*) was based on landownership. The purchase by the Jefferson administration of French Louisiana in 1803, which doubled the size of the US and in the logic of the Jeffersonians created new opportunities for yeoman farmers out West, must be seen in this context. Official rhetoric emphasized that the 1804-06 expedition of the (tellingly named) Corps of Discovery under Meriwether Lewis (1774-1809) and William Clark (1770-1838), which was sent to explore the newly acquired territory, was "destined" to extend the "discovery" of Christopher Columbus and to

explore the Missouri River, and such principal stream of it, as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean; whether the Columbia, Oregon, Colorado or any other river may offer the most direct and practicable communication across the

continent for the purposes of commerce. (*Cong. Rec*. 22 Sept. 1998 to 26 Sept. 1998: 21532)

This expedition provided mappings of and, more generally, data on the West through which its systematic conquest became possible. Most importantly, the members of the expedition employed an evocative literary language in their journals with lasting effect:

> [t]he importance of the Lewis and Clark expedition lay on the level of imagination: it was drama, it was the enactment of a myth that embodied the future. It gave tangible substance to what had been merely an idea, and established the image of a highway across the continent so firmly in the minds of Americans that repeated failures could not shake it. (Smith, *Virgin Land* 17)

The expedition account was later even called "our national epic of exploration" (Coues qtd. in Lawlor, *Recalling* 29).

Despite all the fanciful depictions, the winning of the West was above all a process of taking possession. Jeffersonian (and later Jacksonian) visions of the yeoman going west helped build not a "virtuous republic," but a "violent empire," as Carol Smith-Rosenberg puts it in her study of American national identity, in which many sections of American society (including academics) were complicit; for instance, the history of American geography and cartography not only has us think about Lewis and Clark and those 'explorers' who followed in their footsteps, e.g. Francis Parkman or John C. Frémont (cf. Parkman, *Oregon Trail*; Frémont, *Report*), but also reminds us of the "cartographic imperative" of the Jeffersonian grid system, which we still today connect to visions of the West as vast and monotonous: as "a direct corollary to the doctrine of Manifest Destiny […] the grid exercises authority over space by applying a ruler to it in all senses of the word," as William Fox points out (*Void* 129). Similarly, cultural geographer John Brinckerhoff Jackson noted with regard to foundational American iconography that "it is the grid, not the eagle, not the stars and stripes, which is our true national emblem" (*Sense* 153). The grid, in that it overwrites prior meanings and symbolic structures of the land, is a massively effective instrument of colonization. We may relate this to the beginning of this section and argue that the cultural work of the garden myth is to camouflage this violence by glossing over conflicts and contradictions through its configuration of the American West as an American pastoral that is suggestive of an organic, smooth, and well-measured sense of the (growth of the) nation – in rectangular squares and green fields.

3. "CROSSING A CONTINENT" AND "WINNING A WILDERNESS" – 19TH-CENTURY EXPANSIONISM, THE FRONTIER, AND THE 'WILD' WEST

> Give me land, lots of land
> Under starry skies above,
> Don't fence me in.
> Let me ride through the wide
> Open country that I love,
> Don't fence me in.
> COLE PORTER/ROBERT FLETCHER, "DON'T FENCE ME IN"

The ideology of US expansionism and empire was resonantly articulated by John L. O'Sullivan (1813-1895) in an article published in the *Democratic Review* in 1845 that advocated the annexation of Texas, which indeed came to pass later in the same year; in this editorial, O'Sullivan most notably coined the phrase "manifest destiny:" "The American claim is by right of our 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 federative self government entrusted to us" ("Annexation" 6). O'Sullivan was a journalist, lawyer, and a leading propagandist for the Democratic Party; he also was a key member of the so-called Young America Movement, a group of intellectuals and politicians "who concocted a new ideology of American expansion in the 1840s" (Hine and Faragher, *American West* 199; cf. Eyal, *Young America Movement*). In neo-Jeffersonian fashion, they saw in westward expansion the opportunity for an "agrarian counterrevolution" against industrialization and urbanization in Europe and the Eastern United States (Hietala, *Manifest Design* 105). O'Sullivan's claim that US-Americans by right of their manifest destiny could and should spread over the whole American continent connected the myth of the West to notions of Puritan chosenness and "destinarian thought" (Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny* 55) by rhetorically linking west- and southward expansion to notions of the Promised Land (cf. chapter 3) and *translatio imperii*, and thus expressed an idea that "held currency long before it was sloganized" (Fresonke, *West* 7). Expansionism was a key issue in the presidential elections of 1844, which pitted expansionists such as Democratic candidate James K. Polk, who called for "the reoccupation of Oregon and the reannexation of Texas at the earliest practical period" (insinuating the recovery of territories that had never been 'occupied' or had not even been part of the US in the first place), against anti-expansionists such as then-member of the Illinois General Assembly Abraham Lincoln, who was intent

on "keeping our fences where they are and cultivating our present possession, making it a garden, improving the morals and education of the people" (qtd. in Hine and Faragher, *American West* 201). Polk won the election by a slim margin; yet, the above-quoted statements once again show how the West was used as a kind of empty signifier that could be variously ideologically charged as either a (foreign) space to be conquered or as a (domestic) space to be contained and protected as a (national) garden.

In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner turned O'Sullivan's and many of his contemporaries' claims into a scholarly argument by putting US territorial expansion in the West in the context of geographical determinism and building around it a genuine US-American evolutionary theory in his lecture on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," a text that would firmly lodge the frontier concept in scholarly discourse and everyday speech. Arguing that "[t]he existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development," Turner uses the frontier concept to write a Eurocentric history of settlement in North America that paradoxically tries to downplay America's European roots:

> Thus American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. The true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West. ("Significance")

The West is conceived by Turner not as a specific region or place but as the dynamic space of the frontier, which according to Turner is "the meeting point between savagery and civilization;" he goes on to say that "[t]he most significant thing about it is, that it lies at the hither edge of free land" (ibid.). In that Turner's definition of the frontier remains analytically underdetermined as well as imaginatively evocative, it serves as an "elastic" term (ibid.) describing the experience which Turner believed captures best the ambivalent and partially regressive process of Americanization:

> The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the

garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little, he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs, any more than the first phenomenon was a case of reversion to the Germanic mark. The fact is, that here is a new product that is American. At first, the frontier was the Atlantic coast. It was the frontier of Europe in a very real sense. Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American. (ibid.)

Turner held that the frontier as the prime locus of Americanization generated a "composite nationality" in its "crucible" (ibid.), which has been identified as a specifically American trope in the previous chapter on the melting pot myth. In Turner's view, the frontier also promoted "individualism, democracy, and nationalism […]" (ibid.), which he thus connected to the westward expansion of the US, and served as a kind of safety valve for potential social unrest. His essay concludes with an affirmation of the frontier's importance in shaping the American nation and character by linking it to well-known foundational figures and events such as Christopher Columbus and American independence: "And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history" (ibid.).

Discussions of Turner's frontier thesis have been highly controversial and fill whole libraries. Initially, many scholars still favored Herbert Baxter Adams's thesis about the Germanic origins of America, but Turner's argument soon became widely accepted and by the 1920s had turned into the dominant scholarly opinion on American national history, rendering the American Historical Association, as one critic has it, "One Big Turner *Verein*" (Billington, "Introduction" 3). The persuasiveness of Turner's argument had been amplified in the previous decades by semi- or pseudo-scholarly works such as Theodore Roosevelt's multi-volume *The Winning of the West* (1889-96), which identifies "race expansion" and "Western conquest" as foundational for American nation-building and as a monumental and successful effort at "carv[ing] states out of the forest and the prairie" (*Works* Vol. 9, 527). Throughout the Great Depression and especially after Turner's death in 1932, critical assessments of Turner's work came to the fore in regard to the (a) speculative, (b) hyperbolic, and (c) entirely unempirical character of his argument, which to many no longer seemed convincing:

"How could a frontier environment, which persisted only briefly before the settlement process was completed exert such an enduring influence over […] the nation as a whole?" (Billington, "Introduction" 4). More fundamentally, the Great Depression led to a reconsideration of the frontier myth in general. For one thing, Turner's safety valve argument was reversed in the sense that cities on the Eastern Seaboard rather than the rural West were attributed the function of containing and defusing social turmoil (cf. Shannon, "Not Even"). In a broader framework, George Pierson argued that Turner's thesis had replaced "the God of the Puritans," who had until then vouched for American superiority, with a seemingly "natural force" – the frontier – "as source and justification" of American exceptionalism ("Turner's Views" 39). Rather than supporting this reformulation of exceptionalist designs, Pierson early on argues for a comparative perspective on US history and settlement (cf. ibid. 40). In the 1950s in the context of the 'Cold War,' the Turner Thesis once more was widely praised only to be yet again radically critiqued in the 1970s by revisionist scholars such as Richard Slotkin, Annette Kolodny, and Patricia Nelson Limerick, who have emphasized the violence of colonization and expansionism, the masculinist matrix of discourses about the West and empire-building, and the Eurocentric and ethnocentric biases involved in the frontier logic. Slotkin in particular has addressed the ways in which "the inanimate world of nature" is "humanized" in the appreciation and appropriation of the West, while the Native Americans at the same time are "dehumanized" (*Fatal Environment* 53). The Native American genocide can be considered the gaping absence in Turner's thesis as well as in much of its early revisions; it has only been addressed more fully in the past decades in alternative histories of "how the West was lost," not won by Native Americans (cf. Calloway, *Our Hearts*), of which Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (1970) is perhaps the best-known example. In contemporary scholarship of the so-called New Western Historians, the frontier has become the "f-word," as Patricia Limerick quips ("Adventures" 72). But even if many scholars have found Turner's argument utterly problematic, if not ridiculous, it has not lost its powerful grip on the popular imagination.

Both images of the American West as mythic rural Arcadia and as a site of historic conflict and conquest of mythic proportions remain entangled with each other and are central elements in discourses of nation-building and American exceptionalism in its crudest form, as both agrarians and expansionists ignore or dismiss the indigenous population as inhabitants of the land they seek to conquer and/or 'cultivate:' "The divisibility of the native and the land permitted the formulation of a myth and ideology of expansion in which racial warfare com-

plements the processes of agrarian development" (Slotkin, *Fatal Environment* 53). We can see this complicity perhaps most clearly in writings of authors who are critical of the American empire yet at the same time remain attracted to its expansionist logic. Henry David Thoreau for example, one of the central figures in early American nature writing, wrote that "[t]he nation may go their way to their manifest destiny which I trust is not mine" (qtd. in Fresonke, *West* 128), yet at the same time was fascinated by the West: "Eastward I go only by force; westward I go free" (Thoreau, "Walking" 268). Thoreau, it seems, wanted "a nation of Walden Ponds, just as Jefferson, equally at odds with his own political impetus, wanted a nation of yeoman Monticellos" (Fresonke, *West* 15). Both Thoreau and Jefferson thus are caught in – and perpetuate – the mythical, exceptionalist "frontier magic" (Slotkin, *Fatal Environment* 40).

4. ENGENDERING THE AMERICAN WEST AND MANIFEST DOMESTICITY

> There is a region of America that I have come to call Hisland. In a magnificent western landscape, under perpetually cloudless western skies, a cast of heroic characters engage in dramatic combat, sometimes with nature, sometimes with each other. Occupationally, these heroes are diverse: they are mountain men, cowboys, Indians, soldiers, farmers, miners, and desperadoes, but they share one distinguishing characteristic – they are all men. It seems that all rational demography has ended at the Mississippi River; all the land west of it is occupied only by men. This mythical land is America's most enduring contribution to folklore: the legendary Wild West.
> SUSAN ARMITAGE, "THROUGH WOMEN'S EYES"

Susan Armitage, a feminist scholar of the West, in the above passage defines her field in terms of the absence of women in classical accounts of the West and the westering experience, and via reference to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's feminist utopian classic *Herland*; recuperating and ascertaining the presence of women in the West has been one crucial dimension of engendering (the study of) the West. One of the earliest attempts to document the lives of women in the West is certainly Elizabeth Ellet's *Pioneer Women of the West* (1901), which is based on private sources and biographical material. Dee Brown in his 1958 study of women in the West titled *The Gentle Tamers* clearly relates notions of the 'Wild West' to the 'civilizing' female touch of the "petticoated pioneers" (297), yet refutes historian Emerson Hough's "sunbonnet myth" (*Passing* 93), which implied that women's presence in the West was merely passive and decorative. Even if

Brown documents the female experience in the West as varied by pointing to its oppressive as well as emancipatory dimensions, he still remains largely stuck in a pre-feminist rhetoric, and with the then-common racial bias refers to white women only. Brown's study shows the very limited presence women were granted in the classical discourse on the West, in which two images prevail: on the one hand, the "weary and forlorn frontier wife, a sort of helpless heroine" who is generically derived from the captivity narrative and is often described as a 'Prairie Madonna,' and on the other hand, "the westering woman as sturdy helpmate and civilizer of the frontier" (Myres, *Westering Women* 2); additional stock characters include "the good woman, the schoolmarm, [and] the kindhearted prostitute" (Riley, *Female Frontier* 10). All of these characters have limited agency and are circumscribed by roles which mostly keep them indoors. Additionally, hardly any mention is made in these early studies of Native American, Mexican American, and other non-white women.

An early and noteworthy instance of US memorial culture dedicated to the role of women in the history of the West is the Madonna of the Trail series of twelve statues, which commemorates the endurance of pioneer women in the US. Commissioned by The National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution and created by sculptor August Leimbach, the statues were dedicated in 1928 and 1929, and today are still placed in each of the twelve states along the National Old Trails Road, which led from Cumberland, Maryland, to Upland, California. In the Ohio dedication ceremony, Harry S. Truman stated that the women "were just as brave or braver than their men because, in many cases, they went with sad hearts and trembling bodies. They went, however, and endured every hardship that befalls a pioneer" (qtd. in Algeo, *Harry Truman's* 50). The monuments are placed mostly in small towns in Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Even if the monuments seek to remind us of the hardships undergone by women in the West, their representation of women as mother and nurturing presence in the West affirms traditional gender roles and once again asserts woman's out-of-placeness in the West.

Critical engagement with representations of the West in regard to race and gender and the reconstruction of 'other,' non-hegemonic voices in the West has been more prominently on the agenda of historians and other scholars in the past decades. Women's diaries of their westward journeys have become a valuable source for writing a bottom-up social history of women in the West, to which many scholars have contributed important studies and anthologies such as Julie Roy Jeffrey's *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West? 1840-1880* (1979); Lillian Schlissel's *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (1982); Lillian

Schlissel, Vicki Ruíz, and Janice Monk's *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives* (1988); Glenda Riley's studies *Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1825-1915* (1984) and *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (1988); Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage's *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West* (1997); and Susan Cummins Miller's *A Sweet, Separate Intimacy: Women Writers of the American Frontier, 1800-1922* (2000). All of these studies contributed to complicating our sense of women's presences and roles in the American West, as a result of which also fictional representations of women in the West have changed over time, as can be seen, for instance, in Kelly Reichardt's *Meek's Cutoff* (2010), Ethan and Joel Coen's *True Grit* (2010), or Logan Miller's *Sweetwater* (2013).

Illustration 3: The Frontier Woman as Madonna

W.H.D. Koerner, *The Madonna of the Prairie* (1921).

A second dimension of gender scholarship has been to investigate the particular logic of female absence in conventional accounts and representations of the West. In a Freudian spirit, Leslie Fiedler has defined the American West as symbolizing a male homosocial and at times interracial space "to which White male

Americans flee from their own women into the arms of Indian males, but which those White women, in their inexorable advance from coast to coast, destroy" (*Return* 50). In the context of westward expansion, women have been commonly portrayed as "obstacles to the male hero's freedom" (Georgi-Findlay, *Frontiers* 6) in popular culture, which is why they are often left behind – in the East, in the domestic space of the house or the log cabin, or in the garden.

Yet, processes of gendering do not only relate to women but work in a dialectical dynamic that co-constructs femininity and masculinity, as Annette Kolodny's work on the American West shows. Kolodny points out in *The Lay of the Land* (1975) that women were absented and excluded from conventional accounts of settlement and westward expansion, whereas the land itself was coded in overtly feminine terms in

> what is probably America's oldest and most cherished fantasy: a daily reality of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine – that is, not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification – enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose, and painless and integral satisfaction. (4)

It is the symbolic capital of the feminine, so to speak, that is appropriated to signify metaphorically on the male experience of settlement in a patriarchal fantasy of 'exploring' the 'virgin land.'

This particular form of engendering the American West is not only evident in the 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century primary sources which Kolodny analyzes, but also in earlier Americanist scholarship such as Smith's *Virgin Land*, whose guiding metaphor of a feminized landscape by implication affirms the male figure as colonist, settler, and cultivator. Kolodny's account of this gendered discourse is nuanced and quite explicit: by taking the metaphors of discovery, expansion, and possession literally and seriously in a reading that is both feminist and ecocritical, she views the conquest of the West as "rape" (*Lay* 4).

Among the newly canonized writings on the West by women, we find European women's travel accounts, for example by Frances Trollope, Ida Pfeiffer, and Frederika Bremer, as well as white American writers' fictional and often semi-autobiographical representations of life in the West, for example Caroline Kirkland's *A New Home, Who'll Follow? Or, Glimpses of Western Life* (1839), Eliza Farnham's *Life in Prairie Land* (1846), Catherine Stewart's *New Homes in the West* (1843), or, much later, Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* (1918) and *O Pioneers!* (1913). I will exemplarily single out for closer analysis Caroline Kirkland's text, which after once having been dismissed by Henry Nash Smith as

"extremely simple" (*Virgin Land* 263) has seen a feminist reappraisal over the last decades. Published under the pseudonym "Mrs. Mary Clavers, An Actual Settler," Kirkland in this novel wrote back to male-authored works (by James Fenimore Cooper or John Filson, for instance) that prominently featured romanticized representations of the West by describing

> the very ordinary scenes, manners and customs of Western Life. No wild adventure, – no blood curdling hazards, – no romantic incidents, – could occur within my limited and sober sphere. No new lights have appeared above my narrow horizon. Commonplace all, yet I must tell it. (*New Home* 10)

The irony of Kirkland's "pioneer realism" and early local color writing (Zagarell, Introduction xiv) is often quite biting; by resorting to the conventional topos of modesty often used by female authors, she presents as mere "gossip" (Kirkland, *New Home* 3) what clearly constitutes a critique of patriarchal norms and especially of Jacksonian ideals of manhood. The text unfolds in satirical sketches that depict the settlement of the protagonist in Western Michigan in 1837 and often ridicules male efforts at empire-building, the 'frontier democracy,' and the garden myth (cf. Georgi-Findlay, *Frontiers* 28; Gebhardt, "Comic Displacement" 157). Kirkland also "exposes pastoral conventions as inadequate for writing a western narrative, especially from a woman's viewpoint" (Georgi-Findlay, *Frontiers* 31); her female characters are often isolated, lonely, and dependent on husbands who are abusive alcoholics, utterly inept farmers, or both. At the same time, Kirkland articulates a classist, 'civilized' ideal that connects femininity, domesticity, material culture, and consumerism to a rural setting that quite obviously still lacks proper refinement (cf. Merish, "Hand").

The ideology of domesticity by Kirkland and other 19th-century women writers has also been critically examined with regard to the dominant discourses of expansionism and empire; a third aspect to be addressed in relation to the gendering of the West in terms of space and agency thus concerns the ways in which white women were not only the objects and victims of patriarchal expansionism, but were also complicit in affirming the ideologies of manifest destiny and exceptionalism. Moving beyond a simplistic and binary feminist critique of the frontier myth, Brigitte Georgi-Findlay has shown that women's writing reveals that "the cultural domestication of an eccentric West" does not simply present

> a female countervision to male fantasies of conquest and possession, but is in fact complementary to them: the ideal of domesticity, read in a context of empire building, also

functions as an instrument for imposing cultural and social control and order upon the "disorderly" classes of the West. (*Frontiers* 29-30)

Amy Kaplan's concept of "manifest domesticity" similarly describes the "spatial and political interdependence of home and empire" (*Anarchy* 25) as a kind of "imperial domesticity" (ibid. 29) that can be found in white women's writing of the time: "'Manifest Domesticity' turns an imperial nation into a home by producing and colonizing spectres of the foreign that lurk inside and outside its ever-shifting borders" (ibid. 50). (White) women in the West or moving to the West thus sided with white patriarchy in affirming the civilizing project and its accompanying violence instead of critiquing it.

If, as Kathleen Neils Conzen has suggested, the West is "a family story" negotiating the "insistent themes of family, kinship, and community" ("Saga" 315), the family in the West also figures as national allegory. As Richard Slotkin and others have argued, the ideology of US domestic expansion (particularly after the Louisiana Purchase) has always obscured processes of empire-building and conquest that were anything but a domestic affair by presenting them as family matters, so to speak. On the whole, 19th-century white female perspectives both affirmed and appropriated the myth of the West and its "moral authority" (Slotkin, *Fatal Environment* 126), as recasting the West as a domestic space only reinforced the ostensibly intra-national quality of expansion.

In conclusion of this section, I would like to briefly discuss Nebraskan writer Willa Cather as an outstanding figure of a generation of women writers who addressed the West in the early 20th century. According to critics of her time, Cather's depictions of the West in *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia* are regionalist without being provincial, and nostalgic yet modern (cf. Reynolds, "Willa Cather's"). Cather shows her protagonists to share a deep mythic connection to the land that evolves from the ultimately redemptive and rewarding hardships of farm life; narrator Jim Burden for example muses on the transformations of the Nebraska of his childhood in *My Ántonia*: "[A]ll the human effort that had gone into it was coming back in long, sweeping lines of fertility. The changes seemed beautiful and harmonious to me; it was like watching the growth of a great man or of a great idea" (97). Jim projects the "heartland's vitality" and seemingly organic growth (another aspect of the geographic determinism we are already familiar with from Turner's works) onto Àntonia, who thus "embodies the ideological fantasy […] of national development" (Matthews, "What Was" 294) along the lines of a much older – and deeply problematic – agrarian vision.

5. A VIEW *FROM* THE WEST: JAPANESE AMERICANS AND THE WEST AS A LANDSCAPE OF CONFINEMENT

> The barbed fence
> protected us
> from wildly twisted
> sagebrush.
> MITSUYE YAMADA, "BLOCK 4 BARRACK 4 'APT' C"

The critique of Turner's Eurocentrism has led to correcting a tacit assumption that underlies many representations of the West, namely, that one arrives there from the east – arguably, North America was settled from west to east as well. The history of Asian immigration to America provides a view from the West on the West as East, so to speak, and thus the basis for a forceful rebuttal of the mythical West. Asian immigration to the US and to the 'West' was restricted by a series of exclusionary acts (e.g. the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; the Asiatic Barred Zone Act of 1917; the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924; and the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934) until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which marked the end of the National Origins quota system. Lisa Lowe and Mae Ngai, among others, have traced the way in which "Asian *immigrants*" have been defined in legal, racial, economic, and cultural terms in opposition and contradistinction to "American *citizens*" (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 4). The Asian American experience of the West is marked by "legal exclusions, political disenfranchisement, labor exploitation, and internment" (ibid. 9), which time and again affirmed Asian Americans' status as 'other' and as 'alien' (cf. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*). Against the backdrop of this history, the American West is, not surprisingly, often portrayed by Asian Americans as a space of restriction and confinement rather than of freedom.

I cannot provide a detailed history of Asians' experience of the West here (for example as laborers in the mines and on the transcontinental railroad in the 19th century), but I would like to single out the experience of Japanese Americans during World War II as one of many examples that is at odds with and thoroughly challenges the hegemonic discourse of the West on the West. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the Japanese American population of about 120,000 – of whom about 80,000 were American citizens – came to be seen as a threat to national security by the US government, and was forcibly relocated from the Pacific coast to inland internment camps, or 'War Relocation Centers' (Gila River and Poston, Arizona; Jerome and Rohwer, Arkansas; Manzanar and Tule Lake, California; Amache, Colorado; Minidoka,

Idaho; Topaz, Utah; and Heart Mountain, Wyoming). The 'westering' experience of Japanese immigrants (*Issei*) as well as second and third generation Japanese Americans (*Nisei* and *Sansei*) thus stood in stark contrast to the mythologized one that was propagated by Hollywood and American popular culture at large on an unprecedented scale in the 1940s (close to 100 Western movies were produced in 1942 alone). Yet, Japanese American internment was couched by the US government in terms of exploration, individualism, and mobility: "[T]he language of America's frontier myth […] frame[d] the relocation program. In their information material, government agencies referred to the Japanese Americans as 'pioneers' and to the camps as their 'frontier'" (Streamas, "Frontier Mythology" 175). Alternatively, Japanese Americans were described as "colonists," and the camps as "colonies" (ibid.). In a 1942 pamphlet titled *The War Relocation Work Corps*, a relocation center is defined as a "pioneer community with basic housing and protective services provided by the Federal Government, for occupancy by evacuees for the duration of the war" (qtd. in ibid.). In uncanny ways, this euphemistic rhetoric whitewashes the forced displacement and incarceration of the Japanese American population by "forcing concentration camps into the frontier myth" (ibid. 183).

It is perhaps somewhat surprising that texts by Japanese Americans about the internment experience also use the rhetoric of the frontier, albeit not without irony. In her autobiography *Nisei Daughter* (1953), Monica Sone relates that she was born in Seattle's Pioneer Square neighborhood, the very site of the city's founding, from where she was relocated at age 22 with her family to Camp Harmony in Idaho. When permitted to leave the camp, Sone has to go east, as the internees were at first not allowed to return to the West Coast. The narrator inverts and appropriates slogans like 'Westward, Ho' and 'Go West, Young Man' in chapter titles such as "Eastward, Nisei" (216) and "Deeper into the Land" (226). Throughout her narrative, Sone appropriates American myths in order to describe her experiences, and thereby connects the internment of Japanese Americans to the racist and imperialist logic that underlies the ideology of manifest destiny (cf. Paul, *Mapping* 98); yet, the actual trauma of internment in her text remains an "articulate silence" (cf. Cheung's book on Asian American and Asian Canadian women's writing).

Whereas the desert is addressed in a variety of texts about internment (c.f. e.g. Yoshiko Uchida's memoir *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese American Family* and Mitsuye Yamada's poems and stories in *Desert Run*), there is also a strong focus on gardens and gardening in camp memoirs that documents a particular reaction to the arid landscape which has been read by Patricia Nelson Limerick as a form of resistance to internment, as the (traditional Japanese)

gardens that the internees were cultivating in the camps under adverse circumstances added a new dimension to the Jeffersonian agrarian ideal and to the garden myth of the American West (cf. *Something* 209) – gardening for the internees thus may have been more than a way to improve their bleak living conditions.

Illustration 4: The West as Prison

Anselm Adams, *Manzanar Relocation Center from Tower* (1943).

Not only in the context of internment have Japanese American writers addressed the West as a place of confinement. Hisaye Yamamoto's short fiction (most famously "Seventeen Syllables"), or the plays by Wakako Yamauchi (cf. *Songs*) and Velina Hasu Houston for example often deal with the alienation, loneliness, and melancholia of Japanese American women in the post-World War II rural West. Houston's play *Tea* for instance, which references Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* (1916), focuses on Japanese women who live as "war brides" in Kansas in the 1950s and 1960s; these women's "feeling of lingering exile is a far cry from the sense of boundless opportunity so often associated with immigration to the American West in our national mythology" (Berson, "Fighting" 266). The

counter-image of the West as a traumatic and "grief-haunted place" (Proulx, "Dangerous Ground" 15) that is here articulated in subtle, culturally specific ways is also addressed in many other revisionist and more recent fictional and non-fictional texts and images which comprise what has been identified as "frontier gothic" (cf. Mogen, Sanders and Karpinski's book of the same title).

6. COWBOYS (AND 'INDIANS'): THE AMERICAN WEST IN POPULAR CULTURE

> People from all levels of society read Westerns: presidents, truck drivers, librarians, soldiers, college students, businessmen, homeless people. They are read by women as well as men, rich and poor, young and old. In one way or another, Westerns – novels and films – have touched the lives of virtually everyone who lived during the first three-quarters of this century. The arch-images of the genre – the gunfight, the fistfight, the chase on horseback, the figure of the mounted horseman outlined against the sky, the saloon girl, the lonely landscape itself, are culturally pervasive and overpowering.
> JANE TOMPKINS, *WEST OF EVERYTHING*

Violence in the hegemonic discourse on the 'Wild' West has been largely imagined as regenerative and cathartic (cf. Slotkin, *Regeneration*); the various elements of the frontier myth "center on the conception of American history as a heroic-scale Indian war, pitting race against race" (Slotkin, *Fatal Environment* 32). This fantasy of the West as a site of necessary quasi-mythical violence can be found in print media, performance culture, film, and television, which I will exemplarily address in my discussion of the West in popular culture (and the West's popular culture) in order to uncover the ideological manoeuvres that have contained and controlled violence in the West along with Native American presences and absences and that have belittled or even completely disavowed the Native American genocide. For an analysis of print culture's role in the making of heroes and villains of the West in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, we can turn to pioneer Daniel Boone's (1734-1820) elevation to the status of national hero in John Filson's pamphlet *The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke* (1784) and to the heroes of James Fenimore Cooper's historical romances. Both authors popularized the binary stereotypes of the noble and the ignoble savage, whose most prominent exemplars are perhaps the heroic and 'noble' Chingachgook and Uncas, and the villainous, 'ignoble' Magua in Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826); whereas the former correspond to the

image of the 'vanishing Indian' and support Euro-American westward expansion as they conveniently seem to anticipate their own extinction, the latter is representative of depictions of Natives as barbaric and primitive peoples who need to be vanquished in order for the West to be 'won,' settled, and 'civilized.' Cooper's dichotomous stereotypes have been extremely influential and to this day inform the majority of representations of the West and its indigenous inhabitants. In the logic of Cooper's Native presences, the very existence of the noble savage justifies the racist depiction of Natives in that it ostensibly counterbalances (but actually reinforces) their otherwise more overtly negative characterization.

Even more widely read than Cooper's highly successful novels were the dime novel Westerns, which became an unprecedented phenomenon in publishing and consumer culture in the second half of the 19th century (cf. Bill Brown, "Introduction" 6). Sold at very cheap prices (five to twenty-five cents), these pocketsize 'novels' were put out in series that ensured the recognizability of their title heroes (such as Deadwood Dick or Seth Jones), and prominently included dramatic scenes of violence as a major part of their attraction (cf. ibid. 2). Somewhat paradoxically, these texts projected rugged individualism and outstanding heroism in a format that relied to a large extent on standardization, serialization, and mass consumption:

> If we suppose that the mass-produced myth effected some degree of national cohesion, then we should also suppose that both cohesion and alienation lay in the shared reading practice, the shared relation to consumer culture, and the newly shared pace and privacy of reading as an act of consumption. The material facts of the dime novel's production and distribution help us to appreciate the Western as a rationalization of the West that synchronized the realm of leisure in the rhythms of work and industry. (ibid. 30)

Picking up Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of mass culture in "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," Brown points to the anachronism at the heart of the popularity of the Western: while the success of dime novel Westerns hinged on mass production and thus on the industrialization of the US, the texts depicted pre-industrial frontier life. With the so-called Indian Wars still going on, the dime Westerns time and again staged and re-staged conflicts with the Native population as wars against 'savages' to which there was no alternative. Borrowing selectively from the racist "Cooperian mythology" (Slotkin, *Fatal Environment* 106), these Westerns focused on the ignoble savage and indulged in and legitimized white violence against the indigenous population of the American West (it is only after it had been drastically reduced due to warfare and 'removal' policies that they began to stage conflicts between white men). A

closer look at Edward S. Ellis's *Seth Jones; or, The Captives of the Frontier* (1860), one of the most successful early dime novel Westerns – we could sample randomly from many others to find similar constellations, though – reveals how Native Americans are demonized in stereotypical descriptions such as the following one:

> Behind were a half-dozen savages, their gleaming visages distorted with the passions of exultation, vengeance, and doubt, their garments flying in the wind, and their strength pressed to its utmost bounds. They were scattered at different distances from each other, and were spreading over the prairie, so as to cut off the fugitive's escape in every direction. (197)

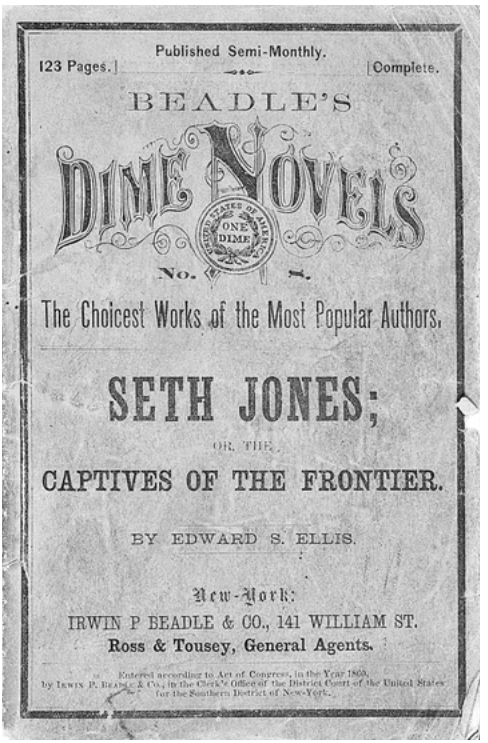
The Natives' dehumanizing representation as evil, animalistic, and dangerous puts them into stark opposition to the white characters, whose sense of entitlement to land and power is unquestioned and whose extreme brutality is condoned and legitimated by the narrative. White violence is described almost gleefully and in disturbing graphic detail, and is obviously supposed to be pleasurable for the (white) audience. The text continues with Seth Jones beginning to take revenge for the capture of whites by the Natives:

> So sudden, so unexpected, so astonishing was the crash of Seth's tomahawk through the head of the doomed savage, that, for a moment after, not an Indian moved or spoke. The head was nearly cleft in twain (for an arm fired by consuming passion had driven it), and the brains were spattered over numbers of those seated around. Seth himself stood a second to satisfy himself the work was complete, and when he turned, walked to his seat, sat down, coolly folded his arms and *commenced whistling*. (212, emphasis in the original)

The slaughtering of the Native in this passage is described in hyperbolic yet at the same time realist fashion; whereas many other cultural productions (including Cooper's) would disavow or at least camouflage violence against Native Americans, in scenes such as this one – which abound in dime novel Westerns, and qualify in some instances as a precursor to what in contemporary jargon is labelled 'torture porn' – even the most 'savage' white violence is represented as acceptable and legitimate in an unequivocal assertion of white superiority. The dime novel Westerns do not claim national allegorical status, which is perhaps why their implication in the construction and affirmation of white supremacy is more overt than in other, more subtle cultural productions. The fact that these mass-produced and mass-consumed fantasies do not hide or feel the need to explain the white violence that they describe points us to the tacit dimension of

the myth of the West in hegemonic discourse: "This is how the Western produces what we might call its 'mythology effect' – with the presumption that the West already exists as shared knowledge, with an absence of detail that insists on familiarity" (Bill Brown, "Introduction" 33). This "familiarity" is grounded in the unquestioned acceptance and successful naturalization of the fundamental ideological premises of frontier discourse, which above all include the assumption that white people's usurpatory presence in North America is justified at all.

Illustration 5: Popular Stereotypes of the West



Cover of *Seth Jones: Or, the Captives of the Frontier* by Edward S. Ellis (New York: Beadle, 1860).

None of these dime novel Westerns have been canonized; in fact, they have often been overlooked despite having constituted a large-scale phenomenon that connects to the earlier texts by James Fenimore Cooper as well as to later writers such as Owen Wister, whose novel *The Virginian* (1902) is often considered the first literary Western. This neglect has perhaps been motivated more by political rather than by aesthetic considerations in that their explicit descriptions of raw

violence in contrast to other texts' more sanitized representations of westward expansion inconveniently point to – rather than obscure or rationalize – the brutality of the 'Indian Wars.'

That the Western is to a large degree "a matter of geography and costume" (Cawelti, *Six-Gun Mystique* 35) is also in evidence in my second example of how the West figures in popular culture: Buffalo Bill's Wild West, a national as well as international phenomenon that evolved out of the 19th-century print culture on the West. This Wild West Show was founded in Nebraska in 1883 by William Frederick Cody (1846-1917), a veteran of the Civil War and former bison hunter who created Buffalo Bill as his alter ego. For roughly 30 years (1883-1916), this show was one of the largest and most popular entertainment businesses in the world; it toured in the US and throughout Europe, and in addition to Buffalo Bill featured other prominent western figures such as James Butler "Wild Bill" Hickok, Annie Oakley, and Calamity Jane. Cody a.k.a. Buffalo Bill became a "national icon" – Larry McMurtry suggests that in his day he was probably "the most recognizable celebrity on earth" (*Colonel* 5) – and a figure that embodied and continued the tradition of earlier well-known fictional and semi-fictional figures of the West such as Natty Bumppo a.k.a. Leatherstocking/Hawkeye, and Daniel Boone; Buffalo Bill carried on the legacy of an ethnically white man who had partially 'gone native' and incorporated aspects of both the white and the Native world yet for the same reason was also an outstanding 'Indian fighter' and buffalo hunter, and was never in doubt about his cultural loyalties and allegiances: the gist of many of Cody's Buffalo Bill sketches is that the white man, time and again, outperforms the Native by using the latter's techniques.

The persuasiveness of these shows can be glimpsed in the following eyewitness account by Dan Muller, who lived and worked with Cody:

> The show started. The band played a lively opening number. The Grand Entry was on. A group of riders appeared in the swinging spotlight at the scenic entrance. They loped around the arena and pulled up at the far end. […] A spotlight now picked up a single rider loping toward the head of the assembled group of riding battalions. "LADEEZ AND GENTLEMEN," shouted the announcer. "ALLOW ME TO PRE-SENT THE GREATEST SCOUT OF THE OLD WEST: BUF-FA-LO B-I-I-I-L-L-L." The trumpets of the band burst into a loud blare of sound. By now Uncle Bill had brought his prancing horse to a theatrical stop that set him up on his hind feet. The crowd roared approval. […] The program was action-packed from the first announcement to the grand closing. […] There was a buffalo chase, and Uncle Bill, riding a horse at the buffalo's flank, blazed away with a rifle. […] There were trick ropers the climax of whose act was dropping a loop over four

running horses. […] But the one I liked best was the stagecoach chase. In this act the stagecoach, drawn by six wildly galloping horses, its top crowded with men with rifles and with riflemen poking their weapons through the windows, tore around the arena with Indians mounted bareback in chase. And all the while the stagecoach blazed with the fire of the rifles and the Indians fired back. It sure was exciting. (*My Life* 113-17)

Illustration 6:
Buffalo Bill Stamp

US Postal Service, *Buffalo Bill Cody 15¢* (1988).

Native Americans figured prominently in Cody's shows; for one thing, because they included re-enactments of 'Custer's Last Stand,' i.e. the defeat of the 7th Cavalry Regiment of the US Army in the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876 by a coalition of Native tribes. This battle re-enactment was performed with Sitting Bull, military leader of the Lakota, who actually led the fateful attack against Custer. Knowing that the Natives' military success had only been temporary, white audiences apparently did not feel threatened by this performance; at the same time, it provided a great deal of spectacle. The collaboration between Cody and Native American leaders has been considered quite remarkable and somewhat puzzling: "Over the years Buffalo Bill managed to engage such figures as Sitting Bull and Geronimo as performers, and a great number of Indians who had fought against the cavalry less than a year before, as well as the services of regular units of the US Cavalry to perform opposite them" (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 68). Besides Native celebrities, Cody also needed Native actors for the 'typical scenes' and tableaux vivants his troupe staged. The ambivalence of their appearance can be grasped when weighing the worldwide reception and (apparently equal) pay they received during the tours against the fact that it helped freeze the image of Natives – by way of the show's content – into that of stereo-

typical, archaic warriors whose resistance to a superior Euro-American civilization had to be overcome, and indeed was by and large overcome by the time the performances took place. At the height of the show's success in the 1890s, Cody's troupe included one hundred Native men, women, and children among a total staff of 500. Bringing the 'Wild West' to Americans throughout the US and to Europe required a logistical effort that was impressive: "In 1899, Buffalo Bill's Wild West covered over 11.000 miles in 200 days giving 341 performances in 132 cities and towns across the United States" (Fees, "Wild West Shows"). Buffalo Bill's Wild West became an international trademark whose successful branding of the American West many performers sought to emulate. The show produced, enhanced, and affirmed the myth of the West and of the frontier for national and international audiences. The decline of the show coincides with the rise of another medium that would become dedicated to representing and mythologizing the West: film. Toward the end of his life and career, Buffalo Bill's show no longer convinced audiences, who sometimes even considered his enactments of the 'Wild West' laughable (cf. Muller, *My Life* 256).

In the 20th century, the Western can be considered the American film genre par excellence; it has been an important object of scholarship in American popular culture studies, and will be my third and final example of cultural productions on the West in this section. From Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) onwards, the Western's negotiation of questions of individualism and community, masculinity, alterity, and violence as well as national and racial supremacy has codified the West as a formative space of US national identity. Visually, it is a genre that can easily be identified: "[W]hen we see a couple of characters dressed in ten-gallon hats and riding horses, we know we are in a Western" (Cawelti, *Six-Gun Mystique* 34). The so-called Golden Age of the Western is often dated from John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939) to Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969), with the latter already operating at quite a distance from the classical Western; Neo-Westerns that have partially absorbed revisionist historiography include Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* (1990), Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992), Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* (1995), Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), and Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (2012).

The Western's long-time popularity, once more, corroborates Robert Dorman's argument that the frontier is "the prime commodity of the *Old West culture industry*" (*Hell* 11). John Cawelti – whose work is closely related to that of Leslie Fiedler and Richard Slotkin – has identified a particular formula of the Western: its setting is the West, i.e a locale that existed in a very brief period of time which is turned into the central "epic moment" (*Six-Gun Mystique* 39); its

cast of characters usually includes settlers and outlaws (who are sometimes Native Americans but, somewhat surprisingly perhaps, more often are white); its hero, who has a horse and a gun, intervenes on behalf of the "agents of civilization" (ibid. 46) while sometimes taking recourse to the same methods as the outlaws in order to win over them, and thus remains ambivalently 'in the middle' as he is at the same 'advancing' and escaping from 'civilization' (cf. ibid. 52); its plots usually revolve around capture, flight, and pursuit (cf. ibid. 67). Cawelti's typology links the Western to the archetypal narrative structure and patterns of the hero myth; the Western thus dramatizes a "foundation ritual" (ibid. 73) in the sense that

> it presents for our renewed contemplation that epic moment when the frontier passed from the old way of life into social and cultural forms directly connected with the present. By dramatising this moment, and associating it with the hero's agency, the Western affirms the act of foundation. In this sense, the Western is like a Fourth of July ceremony. (ibid.)

Cawelti's relevance for discussing the West as a foundational myth is obvious, as in his view the function of the Western is to ritualistically affirm the hero's integrity and innocence despite his acts of violence against what hegemonic discourse represents as 'savages' or 'outlaws;' while some Westerns explore the moral dilemma of innocence and aggression in more ambiguous terms, Westerns by and large still are "fantasies of legitimated violence" and "moralistic aggression" (ibid. 85).

In many ways the Western films seem to transform the 'virgin land' of Henry Nash Smith into a 'crowded prairie' (cf. Coyne's book of the same title) from which, however, one part of the North American population is increasingly and symptomatically absent: In reconstructing the history of the Western, Jane Tompkins observes how Native Americans appear to disappear from a genre for which they actually were foundational (cf. *West*); the topos of the "vanishing race" (Fiedler, *Return*) and the "romance of disappearing" (Lawlor, *Recalling* 41) have been widely noted. In Frank Gruber's typology of basic Western plots, Native Americans appear only in one out of seven: "Custer's Land Stand, or the Cavalry and Indian Story" (qtd. in Cawelti, *Six-Gun Mystique* 35). In line with the pernicious notion of the 'Vanishing Indian,' the West in the Western becomes a stage for white (male) fantasies: "Westerns marginalized the Indian because they were only marginally *about* the Indian" (Coyne, *Crowded Prairie* 5). The white hero's 'just' fight against his enemies instead has a redemptive function in that it provides "regeneration through violence" (cf. Slotkin's book of the same title); the hero's *rite de passage* takes center stage and pushes the

Native genocide to the sidelines, or leaves it completely out of the picture. Roy Harvey Pearce has suggested that in the 19th century, the stereotype of the Native as either evil or noble savage slowly gave way to a white view on Natives as an inferior 'race' that belonged to an earlier (and thus doomed) stage of civilization (cf. *Savagism*). When looking at more contemporary productions, we may wonder if the Neo-Western has managed to challenge or alter the classical Western formula all that much in regard to its deeply problematical ideological underpinnings.

7. THE FRONTIER MYTH AND POLITICAL RHETORIC: THE CASE OF THE 'VIETNAM WAR'

> Vietnam was where the Trail of Tears was headed all along.
> MICHAEL HERR, *DISPATCHES*

> We use the term "Indian country" to describe Vietnam.
> AIRBORNE RANGER INFANTRY VETERAN ROBERT B. JOHNSON

> All I remember is that I was with Custer's Seventh Cavalry riding toward the Little Big Horn and we were struck by the Indians. After we crossed the Rosebud, we made it to Ridge Red Boy and then we were hit. No. I must have my wars confused. That was another time, another place. Other Indians.
> WILLIAM EASTLAKE, *THE BAMBOO BED*

As a public myth and "structure of feeling" (cf. Williams's text of the same title), the West has not only been expressed in mass culture but has also been used in political culture; presidents, presidential candidates, and others seeking or holding office have often fashioned themselves as farmers, cowboys, or pioneers, and employed the rhetoric of the frontier myth. The first 'cowboy president' was probably Andrew Jackson (cf. Lepore, *Story*), a former US Army general who embodied a heady mix of frontierism, militarism, and expansionism. In the context of the 20th and 21st centuries, we may think for example of Lyndon B. Johnson, who wore a Stetson and rode on horseback in his 1964 presidential campaign; Richard Nixon, who exploited his friendship with John Wayne and James Stewart for political gain (cf. Coyne, *Crowded Prairie* 1); Ronald Reagan, who made political use of the cowboy image even if among his 54 films only six were Westerns (cf. ibid.; Rogin, *Ronald Reagan*; Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*); or George W. Bush, who liked to pose on his Texas ranch dressed

in a cowboy outfit. All of them used these references to the West in order to convey a sense of rugged masculinity and strong leadership. By the 20th century, the frontier myth had become engrained in political discourse and campaign rhetoric through a set of tacit references that were understood by all Americans.

One of the best-known examples of an appropriation of the American West in political rhetoric by way of the frontier myth is certainly John F. Kennedy's acceptance speech at the 1960 Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. While Kennedy did not fashion himself as a cowboy during his candidacy and later as president but rather displayed the habitus of an East Coast urbanite, he did use the myth of the West in this so-called "New Frontier" speech, and invested it with new meanings:

> I stand here tonight facing west on what was once the last frontier. From the lands that stretch 3000 miles behind us, the pioneers gave up their safety, their comfort, and sometimes their lives to build our new West. […] [T]he problems are not all solved and the battles are not all won, and we stand today on the edge of a new frontier – the frontier of the 1960s, the frontier of unknown opportunities and perils, the frontier of unfilled hopes and unfilled threats. […] I'm asking each of you to be pioneers towards that new frontier. […] For the harsh facts of the matter are that we stand at this frontier at a turning point of history.

Kennedy's 'new frontier' rhetoric, which helped him win the presidential election, was fuelled by a 'Cold War' logic that would also provide the rationale for the US military involvement in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. The latter's descriptions in official rhetoric, fiction, film, and memoirs likewise often reference the frontier and the 'Indian Wars,' and draw analogies between Native Americans and the Vietnamese (cf. Bates, *Wars* 10):

> The invocation of the Indian war and Custer's Last Stand as models for the Vietnam war was a mythological way of answering the question, *Why are we in Vietnam?* The answer implicit in the myth is, "We are there because our ancestors were heroes who fought the Indians, and died (rightly or wrongly) as sacrifices for the nation." There is no logic to the connection, only the powerful force of tradition and habits of feeling and thought. (Slotkin, *Fatal Environment* 19)

These attempts at making the war in Southeast Asia intelligible and comprehensible through the familiar language of the frontier myth cannot be considered a simple, successful transference; they also challenged American self-perceptions

in new and unprecedented ways, and tested the myth's elasticity and, more profoundly, its validity:

> Vietnam is an experience that severely called into question American myth. Americans entered Vietnam with certain expectations that a story, a distinctly American story, would unfold. When the story of America in Vietnam turned into something unexpected, the true nature of the larger story of America itself became the subject of intense cultural dispute. On the deepest level, the legacy of Vietnam is the disruption of our story, of our explanation of the past and vision of the future. (Hellmann, *American Myth* x)

The interdependency of the myth of the West and the interpretation of the war in Southeast Asia as well as the "Vietnamization" of the West (Coyne, *Crowded Prairie* 120) can be identified on several levels; we can for instance analyze how representations of the 'Vietnam War' use the Western formula in order to describe individual and collective war experiences. The convergence of the West and the East is most clearly evident in the Pentagon-sponsored *The Green Berets* (1968), which was one of the first Vietnam War films; based on Robin Moore's bestselling novel of the same title which had been published three years earlier, it starred and was co-directed by John Wayne, the prototypical Western hero. Hoping to "make the old magic work" (Adair, *Hollywood's Vietnam* 38), this film is quite overtly anti-communist propaganda cloaked in Western imagery: the film's depiction of a base camp in Vietnam is very similar to that of cavalry forts in Westerns, and its demonization of the Vietcong also strongly resembles that of Native Americans in earlier films and other media. The film heroized the Green Berets – i.e., the US Army Special Forces, whose guerrilla and counterinsurgency tactics were endorsed by the Kennedy administration – by representing them as "a fused image of sophisticated contemporary professional and rough Indian fighters" that embodied the "paradox of the genteel killer" and "the death-dealing innocent" on the new frontier in Asia (Hellmann, *American Myth* 46/47). John Wayne's son Michael, who produced the film, would later note in an interview: "Maybe we shouldn't have destroyed all those Indians, but when you are making a picture, the Indians are the bad guys" (qtd. in Adair, *Hollywood's Vietnam* 35).

Thus, from a New Historicist perspective, *The Green Berets* can be read as a film that makes sense of the 'Vietnam War' by employing the Western's mode of representing the 'Indian Wars.' Other Vietnam War films also transpose the myth of the West, and in particular the myth of the frontier, to Vietnam: Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978) references James Fenimore Cooper's historical frontier romance *The Deerslayer* (1841); *First Blood* (1982) places its pro-

tagonist Rambo (Sylvester Stallone), a former Green Beret and traumatized war veteran, on the outskirts of a small American town in a quasi wilderness, thus rendering him an inverted Natty Bumppo; its sequel *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), a latter-day American captivity narrative, once again stages Rambo as a prototypical 'Indian fighter' who this time is on a mission to liberate American soldiers from Vietnamese POW camps; *Apocalypse Now* (1979) by contrast uses the hardboiled detective genre – which can be considered to have transposed the 'Wild West' into an urban context – to more radically depict "Vietnam as a nightmare extension of American society" (Hellmann, *American Myth* 201), and further undermines "the idealistic self-concept embodied in the American hero" (ibid. 203) through its references to Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Let me add in passing that we can also examine how the war in Southeast Asia changed the American Western proper; as a case in point we may consider *Little Big Man* (1970), an early revisionist Western based on Thomas Berger's 1964 novel of the same title that "portrayed the settling of the frontier as a succession of My Lai's" (Hellmann, *American Myth* 95).

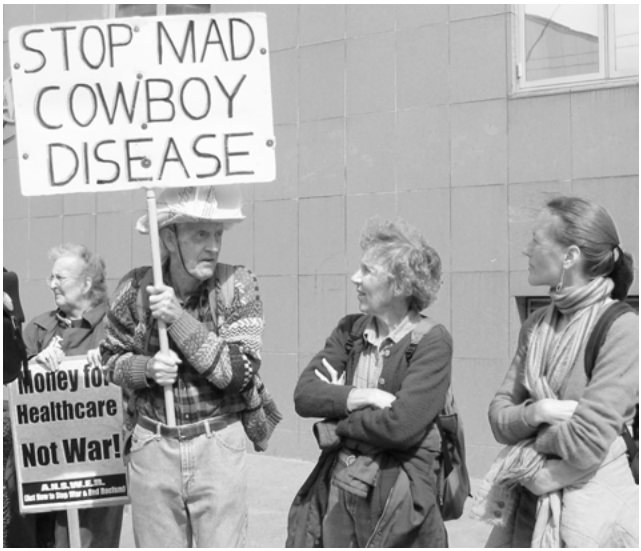
As John Clark Pratt points out in a similar context, we can observe that "the literature of the Vietnam War is filled with American characters who enter Vietnam as traditional frontier huntsmen, then become men trying merely to survive in a wilderness they do not understand" ("Lost Frontier" 238). In many ways, Vietnam brought the American foundational mythic formula to a crisis, because the myth failed to successfully work the war into a coherent narrative; as many have noted, the war could not be easily contained in the language of the frontier myth, and moreover brought to the surface the 'origins' of the myth – the collectively dis- or misremembered 'Indian Wars' – which thus became the object of reinterpretation. "The war did what almost nothing else could have: it forced a major breach in consciousness" (Charles Reich qtd. in Hellmann, *American Myth* 76). Hellmann also suggests – in language echoing that of earlier Americanists – that Vietnam became "a landscape in the American consciousness that would have to be journeyed through many times over, self-consciously experienced through narrative art as myth and symbol" (ibid. 95). We may thus consider the war in Southeast Asia as an event that unsettled the heroic myth of the West in that it brought to the fore the violence inscribed into it as well as the utter 'ugliness' of US military engagement in Asia and elsewhere (cf. William Lederer and Eugene Burdick's 1958 political novel *The Ugly American*). However, official efforts at (re-)mythologizing Vietnam continue to this day, as president Obama's 2012 proclamation in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the war show:

[W]e reflect with solemn reverence upon the valor of a generation that served with honor. We pay tribute to the more than 3 million servicemen and women who left their families to serve bravely, a world away from everything they knew and everyone they loved. From Ia Drang to Khe Sanh, from Hue to Saigon and countless villages in between, they pushed through jungles and rice paddies, heat and monsoon, fighting heroically to protect the ideals we hold dear as Americans. (Presidential Proclamation)

The doubts about individual and collective American identities triggered by the war were articulated in many forms; representatives of the American counter-culture and the peace movement argued that Vietnam revealed the pathological nature of the American empire, or, less radically, that it signified a loss of values. Activists and writers who visited North Vietnam, among them Susan Sontag, regarded Vietnam as "the America that no longer exists" (Hellmann, *American Myth* 85); the innocence yet also the 'primitiveness' and 'backwardness' Sontag perceives are evident in many instances of her travel report *Trip to Hanoi* (1968), in which she pastoralizes Vietnam and describes its inhabitants as "children – beautiful, patient, heroic, martyred, stubborn children" (15). Whereas the 'Indians' of Vietnam are demonized in productions such as *The Green Berets*, they are infantilized by Sontag and other countercultural voices, which constitutes a form of othering that is hardly less problematical. Thus, we can see that the Vietnamese are still described within the bounds of the myth of the West – as evil or noble 'savages.'

Lastly, there is yet another aspect to the connection between Vietnam and the American Indian Wars which centers on Native American agency rather than on the objectification of 'natives.' In the midst of the 'Cold War,' 'Indian country' migrated back from Vietnam to the American heartland when Native American activists occupied the town of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, from February 27 to May 8, 1973. The protest of the American Indian Movement (AIM) at Wounded Knee focused on what many considered as America's racist imperialism at home (cf. Rosier, *Serving* 264) and was joined by a number of Native American veterans who had just returned from Vietnam. The protest in South Dakota soon appeared as a (semi-staged) re-creation of Vietnam which indicated that for the US, the 'Cold War' had both an international as well as a domestic side to it (ibid. 269). Woody Kipp, a member of the Blackfeet Nation and a US Marine Corps veteran who fought in Vietnam, would in his memoirs titled *Viet Cong at Wounded Knee: The Trail of a Blackfeet Activist* (2004) refer to this connection as the "pervasive issues of race and dominance [...] that have shaped and formed this country since its earliest days" (141).

Illustration 7: The Anti-Mad Cowboy



Photograph by Gail Williams (2005).

Clearly, and in spite of the most radical protest at the time of the war in Southeast Asia, the frontier myth was not entirely debunked and much less destroyed, but perhaps it was expanded to the extent that post-Vietnam, it could include failure as well as triumph and victory. Beyond Vietnam, the US national security apparatus has continued to conflate 'Indians' with those it felt the need to frame as enemies, and to use the semantics of the frontier myth in acts of epistemic violence; the Old West revenge tale, for instance, has figured prominently in the political rhetoric of the 'War on Terror' ('dead or alive'), and it led protesters against the War in Iraq to chant "it's the Middle East, not the Wild West" (Kollin, "Introduction" x). A connection between the 'Indian Wars' and US foreign policy was established once again in May 2011 when 'Geronimo,' the name of an Apache leader, was used as a code word in the CIA-led operation that presumably resulted in the killing of Osama bin Laden.

8. CONCLUSION: THE TRANSNATIONAL WEST

> The west is everywhere.
> KRIS FRESONKE, *WEST OF EMERSON*
>
> There's a bit of the West in all of us.
> WRANGLER ADVERTISING SLOGAN

In his study *The Rhizomatic West*, Neil Campbell seeks to define "westness" (41) beyond a national paradigm and considers the West as a "travelling" and "mobile discourse" (ibid. 1) and, with James Clifford, as a "travelling concept" (*Routes* 4). Paul Giles has asked us to view "native [American] landscapes refracted or inverted in a foreign mirror" in order "to appreciate the assumptions framing these narratives and the ways they are intertwined with the construction and reproduction of national mythologies" (*Virtual Americas* 2). Similarly, the approach of critical regionalism – a term popularized by Kenneth Frampton (cf. "Towards") – allows us to focus on the West in its local and global dimensions simultaneously, and to look at the connections between both.

A transnational view would thus, first, privilege the cultural mobility and non-American appropriations of the American West: in Europe, the myth of the West has been affirmed in appropriations of the Western genre for instance by the German author Karl May and the Belgian cartoonist Maurice de Bevere (a.k.a. Morris), whose characters Winnetou and Lucky Luke have become iconic figures. Their re-articulation of the myth of the West is relevant in various cultural and temporal contexts; May's Winnetou stories are still staged yearly at the Karl May Festival in Bad Segeberg, and are parodied in *Der Schuh des Manitu* (2001), which to date is the greatest commercial success in German film history, while murals depicting scenes from the Lucky Luke comics series decorate houses in Brussels. Whereas Karl May's fictional West has been quite thoroughly studied (cf. Schmidt, *Sitara*; Sammons, *Ideology*), little cultural studies scholarship so far exists on Morris's work.

From a different vantage point we may also consider the Western not only as the prototypical US-American film genre but also as, in fact, a transnational genre, as classic Westerns have inspired eastern remakes, and vice versa. Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1961), which is indebted to Dashiell Hammett's novel *Red Harvest* (1929), in turn is the 'original' to Italian filmmaker Sergio Leone's *Per un pugno di dollari* (1964), which invested the genre with a new sense of irony and cynicism.

Kurosawa's films have served as models for American Western films time and again: His *Seven Samurai* (1954) served as the template for John Sturges's *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), and *Yojimbo* was adapted once again by Walter Hill as *Last Man Standing* (1996). At the same time, the so-called 'Eastern' has emerged as a global, commercially successful hybrid that fuses the formula of the Western with that of the martial arts film. In looking at these cultural productions, we may ask ourselves how we can conceive of such a mythic fusion critically in terms of orientalist as well as 'western' discourses, and how the myth of the West – either in its agrarian/pastoralist or in its expansionist version – can be transposed and translated into other (sub)cultural and (trans)national contexts; another question would be whether we should consider these translations and appropriations as affirmative or subversive in regard to canonical accounts of the myth of the West.

A transnational view, second, necessitates looking more closely at economic factors and the neoliberal logic that shapes the identity of regions and their international reception/consumption in a globalized world: Critical regionalist scholars have their eyes on processes of globalization that also 'produce' regions as marketable commodities, and the West – as (part of) a "corporate geography" (Cheryl Herr, *Critical Regionalism* 3) – has been such a commodity for a long time. Global enterprises attest to that, for instance the online shopping center New West Mall (newwestmall.com), or Disney, whose theme parks in Anaheim, Bay Lake, Tokyo, Paris, and Hong Kong include a so-called Frontierland made up of generic cowboys, pioneers, saloons, and other stereotypical 'Wild West' features. No explicit mention is made of Native Americans in the parks located in the US, where the so-called Indian Village that had previously been part of Frontierland has been removed. The biggest Frontierland is that in Disneyland Park (Paris), which also includes the so-called Pocahontas Indian Village. In Tokyo Disneyland, it is called Westernland, as 'frontier' does not adequately translate into Japanese; ironically, both theme parks in Asia focus on the history of mining in the West – a history that includes the large-scale exploitation of Asian immigrants who were being used as forced labor on the so-called mining frontier – which in the parks however is transfigured and symbolically and economically exploited once more.

A critique of local/global capitalism would have to go back to US expansionism in the West and to agrarianism, which have always been connected by commercial interests that upon closer inspection also demystify the myth of the garden and of manifest destiny, as Thorstein Veblen has noted:

> The country town is a product and exponent of the American land system. In its beginning it is located and "developed" as an enterprise of speculation in land values; that is to say it is a businesslike endeavour to get something for nothing by engrossing as much as may be of the increment of land values due to the increase of population and the settlement and cultivation of the adjacent agricultural area. It never (hitherto) loses this character of real-estate speculation. This affords a common bond and a common ground of pecuniary interest, which commonly masquerades under the name of public patriotism, public spirit, civic pride, and the like. (*Imperial Germany* 334)

The ideology of manifest destiny is certainly an important part of the patriotic spirit Veblen describes. A number of cultural productions, among them the television series *Deadwood* (2004-2006), have recently addressed the capitalist logic of early settlement, which established still existing structures of economic exploitation in the West and at times outside the borders of the US. *Deadwood* has been applauded for its postwestern, critical representation of "life within a world ordered entirely around the marketplace" (Worden, "Neo-liberalism" 221), which points to the capitalist logic underlying Euro-American settlement in North America, and from which the standard heroism and nostalgia that continues to be an important dimension of the myth of the West is largely absent. With Daniel Worden, we can interpret the West as a national allegory that connects past, present, and future and that also reveals the violence at work in economic transformations within the larger "incorporation of America" (cf. Trachtenberg's book of the same title), an incorporation that does not stop at national borders.

A transnational critical regionalist framework, third, also pays new attention to comparative frameworks of analysis. The West and its myth(s) are analyzed from such angles, for instance, by The Comparative Wests Project at Stanford University, which researches "the common histories and shared contemporary issues among Indigenous populations and settler colonialists in Australia, New Zealand, Western South America, the Western United States, Canada, and the Pacific Islands" (comparativewests.stanford.edu). The American Midwest and Ireland have also been analyzed as two regions whose histories have been connected to and shaped each other over a long period of time (cf. Cheryl Herr, *Critical Regionalism*). Comparative border studies (cf. Sadowski-Smith, "Introduction") touch upon constructions of the American West and its borders with other regions, particularly those to the south. Russell Ward has probed Turner's thesis with regard to Australian history and the construction of an Australian frontier narrative in his study *The Australian Legend* (1958), which may well be seen as the search for an Australian Adam in analogy to R.W.B. Lewis's *The American Adam*, published only a few years earlier. From a historical

perspective, Edward Watts urges us to study the West (in particular the Midwest) not only as an American region in an intranational context but also as a colony – or "hypercolony" – "within the context of the global European diaspora of the nineteenth century," as it shares certain features with other Dominions of the British Empire at the time ("Midwest" 166, 169, 174); Watts holds that it

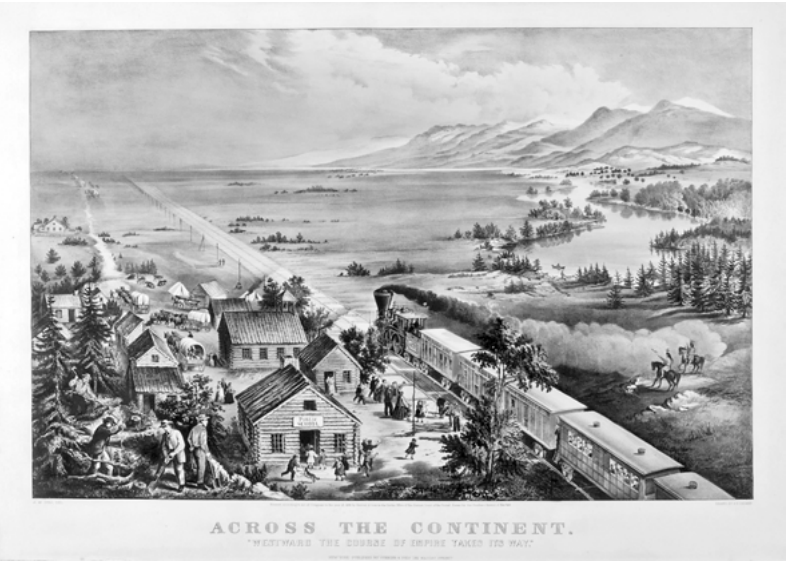
> turns more on the scholarly redefinition of what a colony is (and what its relationship to its metropolis is) than on whether the Midwest was ever a colony to the East the same way Massachusetts was a colony of the British Empire in 1776. A colony in the eighteenth century was one thing; in the nineteenth, another. And the Midwest can and should be studied alongside not just the other regions with whom it shares a nation, but also alongside the other colonies with whom it shared a century. (ibid. 187)

Critical regionalism thus calls for an internationalization of the study of regions in the US and for connecting the West as region, fantasy, and brand to concepts of (neo)colonialism and globalization.

9. STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Identify and discuss the different meanings of the American West. How can they be contrasted, and what do they have in common?
2. Why may mapping the West in geographical terms be difficult? What kind of maps can you think of that capture the (myth of the) American West?
3. Give a brief definition of what Frederick Jackson Turner refers to as "the significance of the frontier in American history."
4. Interpret Frances Flora Bond Palmer's *Across the Continent: "Westward the Course of Empire Makes Its Way"* (1868). How does it represent the West and westward expansion?

Illustration 8: Westward Expansion



Frances Flora Bond Palmer, *Across the Continent: "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way"* (1868). (Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Kathy and Ted Fernberger, 2009).

5. Read Stephen Crane's short stories "The Blue Hotel" and "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" and discuss how Crane's representations of the West undermine prevailing stereotypes of his (and our) time.
6. Watch and discuss commercials that use the myth of the West. A good place to start would be the "So God Made a Farmer" Ram Trucks commercial from Super Bowl 2013 with Paul Harvey, which is available on the internet.

7. Choose a Western movie and discuss its representation of the West and the frontier.
8. Discuss the implications of the myth of the West with regard to different ethnic groups in the US (Native Americans, Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, African Americans).
9. Give reasons for the success of Buffalo Bill's Wild West in Europe. Can you draw analogies to other, perhaps more recent phenomena?
10. The opening sequence of the television series *Star Trek* begins with a voice-over declaring "space" to be "the final frontier." Discuss this opening in the context of the frontier myth.

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