Making the White Man's West

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Making the White Man’s West: Whiteness and the Creation of the American West.

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Charles Fletcher Lummis and Frank Bird Linderman were painfully aware that they had missed the show. It would be the better part of a decade before the US Census Bureau and Frederick Jackson Turner announced the end of the frontier, but by the mid-1880s its passing already seemed obvious. Timing, no doubt, had a profound influence on both men. They came to understand the West not in terms of progress and settlement, as had an earlier generation, but rather as a place threatened by those same forces. Lummis and Linderman underwent a process of transformation, of becoming westerners, or, to use historian Hal Rothman’s term, neo-natives, people from outside the region who became westerners and, in their cases, self-appointed experts and defenders of the region’s culture. The transformation into westerners forever altered their conception of the West and its people. Seeing the West through the lens of romanticism and anti-modernism, they envisioned a region where Native Americans (and in Lummis’s case Hispanics) would remain a vital part of the culture and society and where the negative characteristics of modern America, especially Southern and Eastern European immigration, would be
kept at bay. The West would emerge as a haven for Anglo-Americans where the region’s colorful racial groups could be preserved while remaining little more than quaint. The West could be a refuge for whiteness, they hoped, a last chance to create an ideal society. In celebrating a romantic version of diversity while arguing for the continued dominance of Anglo-Americans, Lummis and Linderman put the last touches on the intellectual creation of the white man’s West.

Like many people before him, the lithe, twenty-five-year-old Charles Fletcher Lummis set out for opportunity in the West, although in his case opportunity came in the form of a job at the Los Angeles Times. It was the fall of 1884. Unlike his contemporaries in an age of transcontinental railroads, Lummis decided to walk. He intended this roughly 2,500-mile journey from Chillicothe, Ohio, to Los Angeles to be equal parts publicity stunt and a sincere attempt to discover the West for himself. Like his Harvard classmate and friend Theodore Roosevelt, Lummis believed in the strenuous life, and he hoped to find himself in the arid land of mesas and canyons. He was far from unique in his desire to find meaning in the West. Roosevelt, the writer Owen Wister, and the artist Frederic Remington also went west to act out an increasingly common ritual of national and self-discovery—all believing that the West remained authentic, preindustrial, and Anglo-dominated. Going west, quite simply, meant returning to a time when (white) men were men. Roosevelt, Wister, and Remington sojourned in the West before returning to the East, where they mingled with the most powerful elements in the nation, but their time in the West had transformed them into supposedly stronger and better men. The West, for these men and others, remained an “agrarian, rural, egalitarian, and ethnically and racially homogenous” region, which compared favorably to the “industrial, urban, elitist, ethnically heterogeneous, and racially mixed” East, according to the historian G. Edward White. Perhaps somewhat ironically, the western experience prepared Roosevelt, Wister, and Remington to lead and shape an eastern-dominated, ethnically diverse, industrial society. All these men emerged from the experience changed in important ways, but Lummis and Linderman, unlike Roosevelt, Remington, and Wister, went west and stayed.

Lummis and Linderman set out to celebrate the West and its cultures, one in Southern California and the other in Montana. They argued that the region still offered an antidote to the problems of industrialization,
Figure 4.1. Studio Portrait of Lummis before His Tramp, 1884. Part publicity stunt and part a genuine effort to learn about his new home, Charles Fletcher Lummis walked from Chillicothe, Ohio, to Los Angeles, California. As he said, the trip enabled him to transcend from a “little, narrow, prejudiced, intolerant Yankee” into a westerner who appreciated Hispanic and American Indian cultures. These cultures helped make the West unique and superior in many ways to the East, he believed. Courtesy, Braun Research Library Collection, Southwest Museum, Autry National Center, Los Angeles, CA
pollution, and non-Anglo immigration. A writer, reporter, editor, and self-taught combination of ethnologist, archaeologist, and historian, Lummis’s varied career became the consummate example of the active intellectual, the uniquely American type of thinker and doer. Eventually, his opinions and reputation would carry weight far beyond Southern California. His fiery zeal for the Southwest, rather than any intellectual achievements, made him well-known in his era. He was certainly a popularizer, but in being so he left a lasting legacy.

Frank Bird Linderman, trailing Lummis by less than a year, went west in 1885 at age sixteen. He chose as his destination the Flathead Lake country of the Montana Territory, the most isolated place he could find on a folded and refolded map of the nation. In his memoir, he called the place the “farthest removed from contaminating civilization,” no mean consideration for a boy who feared “that the West of my dreams would fade away before I could reach it.” A friend and an African American coachman employed by his friend’s family accompanied him. The coachman had been a cavalryman in the West, and he filled the boys’ minds with stories of the wild and untamed region. Following an eventful train trip to Montana, the trio settled in the Flathead country, but after a few days his companions grew homesick and returned to Ohio. Linderman decided to stick it out and learn to be a trapper.

In the Flathead country Linderman found a landscape as romantic as his fantasies, a place filled with howling wolves and marked only by the tracks cut by deer and Indians. The latter in particular stoked his imagination and, in time, inspired his anthropological works, works deeply tinged by his belief in the vanishing West and a threatening modern, industrial world. According to the historian Sherry L. Smith, Indians “represented, for him, the most powerful symbols of a West that was no more.” Linderman in Montana Adventure never gave a name to the black man with whom he went West, referring to him only as “the negro,” but American Indians left him astounded. He stared, dumbfounded, when encountering a Flathead Indian smoking “with such an air of peace and contentment that I fairly ached to shake hands with him.” He explained that the man’s name was Red-horn, a “renowned Flathead warrior” whose martial skills were widely respected by his friends and feared by his enemies. Linderman felt grateful that the powerful warrior treated him like a man, though he knew instinctively “that I was a rank pilgrim.” This represented, Linderman thought, a sort of acceptance by the Indians and
even by the Montana wilderness. Leaving his childhood behind him in the East, he had become a man and, even better, a frontiersman. He flattered himself for a moment, writing, “I feel nearly as they do, I am quite certain.” He quickly corrected himself and admitted that this conceit was probably “only imagined success.” Nevertheless, he felt pride in being accepted into a world he had once dreamed about, and this acceptance extended beyond Indians to another romantic group: Montana trappers.

Linderman caught up with the aging trappers at the twilight of the fur trade. Later, when he himself had grown gray, he noted that they were “unlike any type that lives today,” and being accepted by them “was like joining a fraternity.” Linderman would spend the rest of his life believing sincerely that he had glimpsed the end of an era, and he would do his best to preserve the vestiges of that world through print and political action.

Later in life, Linderman would go even farther, asserting that he was in fact even more Indian than younger Indians. In his biography of the Crow woman Pretty-shield, he quoted the old woman as worrying about the condition of modern Indians. One of Pretty-shield’s grandsons entered the room during one of Linderman’s interviews with her. He described the teenage boy as “decked out in the latest style of the ‘movie’ cowboy, ten-gallon hat, leather cuffs and all.” His appearance prompted Pretty-shield to “wonder how my grandchildren will turn out . . . They have only me, an old woman, to guide them, and plenty of others to lead them into bad ways.” Linderman saw older Indians like Pretty-shield as more genuine and noble than modern Indians. Comparing Goes-together, his translator, to Pretty-shield, he remarked, “She [Goes-together], a comparatively young woman of the same blood as Pretty-shield, frequently complained of her physical condition, had done this less than an hour ago. Pretty-shield, nearly twice the age of Goes-together, had remained an old-fashioned Indian, believing as her grandmother had believed. She had nothing to complain of, no affliction, excepting grandchildren.” Modern Indians, like Goes-together and Pretty-shield’s army of grandchildren, had lost connection with their past and grown lazy, weak, and infirm. They had, in essence, lost what made them Indian. Linderman, in contrast, felt he shared with Pretty-shield the same authentic experiences.

Linderman felt that he, too, belonged to this noble age of heroes. In Pretty-shield he went to great lengths to assert his authenticity as a westerner and his
affinity with Indians. The first line of his book made this clear: “Throughout forty-six years in Montana I have had much to do with its several Indian tribes, and yet have never, until now, talked for ten consecutive minutes directly to an old Indian woman.” While the overall point of the sentence is to pique the reader’s interest in the hidden world of Indian women and to assert the importance of the story he is about to tell, it also provides readers with his credentials as an expert and a Montanan.

For Charles Fletcher Lummis, becoming a westerner meant coming to appreciate both the region and its peoples. His 1884 walking tour marked the transformative moment of his life. He went West armed with standard-issue views of Hispanics and Native Americans. Both groups appeared as curious, inferior novelties and anachronisms to the young reporter. He best articulated his early views about American Indians and Hispanics in a series of letters for his former employer in Ohio, the Chillicothe Leader. He first encountered Native Americans at the Indian school in Lawrence, Kansas. After laughing at the funny translations of the students’ names, Lummis concluded, “The whole institution is under the charge of James Marvin, L.L.D., an educator of almost national reputation, and he shows by deeds his faith that here lies the true solution to the vexed and vexing ‘Indian Question.’”

Such an endorsement for educators’ assimilation policy made his skin crawl in later years. Indeed, only a few years later, Lummis would become an ardent critic of Indian schools, even going so far as to initiate lawsuits in federal court against the policies of Indian educators. In August 1899 Lummis launched an assault on Indian education in Land of Sunshine (renamed Out West in 1902), a California promotional periodical he converted into a respected western magazine. The seven-month series, titled “My Brother’s Keeper,” excoriated the assimilation policy of schools like those in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and Hampton, Virginia. Led by the reformer Captain Richard Henry Pratt, these schools sought to transform Indian children by removing them from their families and tribes and forcibly assimilating them into American society. In his first salvo against the policy, Lummis wrote that Pratt’s method effectively alienated children from their native cultures while ill-preparing them for life in the larger American world: “The confessed theory is that he [the Indian child] has no right to have a father and mother, and they no right to him; that their affection is not worth as much to him as the chance to be a servant to some Pennsylvania farmer or blacksmith, and
generally at half wages.” In a letter to President Theodore Roosevelt early in his administration, Lummis congratulated the president and expressed his great optimism that Roosevelt’s would be the first administration to have a competent Bureau of Indian Affairs. This was important, Lummis argued, because “I care for Indians not as ‘bric-a-brac’ but as actual humans.”

In *A Tramp across the Continent*, the memoir of his 1884 journey across the West, he marveled at the quiet Pueblo villages he encountered. Like the good New Englander he was, he called the reader’s attention to the thrift and hard work of the sedentary Indians of the Rio Grande valley. A highly developed civilization, with irrigated farms and well-built homes, the Pueblos appeared the model of the industrious Indian. Lummis explained to readers that they “had learned none of these things from us, but were living thus before our Saxon forefathers had found so much as the shore of the New England.”

To be sure, Lummis did not believe all Indians were equal. He liked the Pueblo peoples best, harbored some suspicion of the Navajo, and believed the Hualapais of the Mojave stood out as “a race of filthy and unpleasant Indians, who were in world-wide contrast with the admirable Pueblos of New Mexico . . . They manufacture nothing characteristic, as do nearly all other aborigines, and are of very little interest.”

Lummis, like most self-appointed Indian protectors, could also be condescending toward them. The slogan, for example, of his Indian rights group, the Sequoya League, was “‘To Make Better Indians,’” something Lummis felt he knew how to do better than men like Pratt. Similarly, he warned Roosevelt that the policy of severalty, by which tribal lands were broken up into individual landholdings, most famously part of the 1887 Dawes Allotment Act, threatened Indian independence. The best solution, he argued, would be to ensure that individual Indian landowners be prohibited from selling their lands for at least fifty years. The reason was that “the Indian is not yet of age and he needs the protection we give to our minors.” Needless to say, his paternalism sounded little different than Pratt’s, but Lummis at least respected Indian cultures.

Similarly, he entered the West with assumptions about the region’s Hispanic population. In southern Colorado he encountered his first Hispanic villages. Of the residents of the village of Cucharas he wrote, “In it, in lousy laziness, exist 200 Greasers of all sexes, ages and sizes, but all equally dirty.” He continued, in his November 18, 1884, letter, to describe the Hispanics of
southern Colorado in a less than favorable light, concluding with an overtly racist joke. "Not even a coyote," he told his growing number of readers (his letters were widely published by eastern newspapers), "will touch a dead Greaser, the flesh is so seasoned with the red pepper they ram into their food in howling profusion." Only a decade later, in Land of Sunshine, he recanted his earlier views and wrote, ‘‘Greaser’ . . . is a vulgar phrase which more soils the mouth that speaks it than the person at whom it is aimed. It is precisely on a par with the word ‘nigger’; as offensive per se, and as sure [a] brand of the breeding of the user.”

As for the Chinese, a group that drew most of the wrath of California and western nativists, Lummis again voiced positive views. Given that he lived in California, it is not surprising that he commented mostly on the Chinese in the state. In the November 1900 issue of Land of Sunshine, he praised Sui Sin Fah (the pen name of Edith Maude Eaton, a British Chinese contributor to the magazine). Of her work he wrote, “To others the alien Celestial is at best mere ‘literary material’; in these stories he (or she) is a human being.” Nevertheless, her exotic pen name considerably augmented her story’s literary worth. In the same issue Lummis advocated a harsh response to the Boxer Rebellion but reminded readers, “We have massacred a good many foreigners, ourselves, in this Christian land. Our Boxers have murdered Chinese in Rock Springs and other centers of civilization; Italians in New Orleans; and Negroes everywhere.” He warned that the western powers should restrain themselves and not murder innocent people who had no voice in the Chinese government.

Lummis made it clear that becoming a westerner led him to transcend his racist views. In A Tramp across the Continent, which did not appear until nearly a decade after his transcontinental hike, he used the story of his ignorance to editorialize on the problems of racism. He sincerely asked his readers: "Why is it that the last and most difficult education seems to be the ridding ourselves of the silly inborn race prejudice? We all start with it, we few of us graduate from it. And yet the clearest thing in the world to him who has eyes and a chance to use them, is that men everywhere—white men, brown men, yellow men, black men—are all just about the same thing. The difference is little deeper than the skin.”

Long before finally reaching Los Angeles, he had become a convert to the West and a prophet of a proto-multiculturalism. Reflecting on this late in
life, he wrote in his weekly column in the *Los Angeles Times*, “I wasn’t born a frontiersman—I Earned it. I was born a little, narrow, prejudiced, intolerant Yankee.” Conversely, he argued, “the real Western Spirit is as much broader, freer, braver, richer, more independent and more tolerant than [northeastern] Puritanism or Tenderfootedness.” He also believed its native inhabitants, the region’s Hispanics and American Indians, offered much to society and should continue to exert some influence in shaping the West. Imbued with the passion of the converted, Lummis would be a defender of the West and its people for the rest of his life.

An exceedingly complex, if often inconsistent, individual, Lummis took a progressive stance on issues of race, but his attitude toward new immigrants proved much less charitable. Lummis often crowed about the superiority of California society in comparison to the East because it lacked the large numbers of “indigestible” immigrants that plagued cities like Boston and New York. In an article in the January 1895 issue of *Land of Sunshine*, Lummis’s first month on the job, he explained the superiority of the “golden state” to the East. California was growing rapidly, but, he argued, it was the quality of the immigrants that made it different. People of “wealth and refinement” chose to relocate to Los Angeles, whereas “elsewhere the bulk of immigration has been of at least indifferent stuff.” These people of wealth and refinement tended to be Anglo-Americans who left to escape the East and often to find renewed health and a sense of purpose in California. Lummis’s native New England, which became a favorite target of the combative editor, witnessed a degradation of its society as a result of “an invasion which has seriously lowered the mean of culture.” The difference in the quality of immigrants meant “there is no criminal class [in Southern California]; practically no pauper class.” Of course, California had a few undesirable types, “but numerically they are lonely, and politically and socially the good citizen is not ruled by them.”

Lummis was never subtle and, in case the reader missed the point, he continued by extolling Los Angeles’s ethnic virtues: “Our ‘foreign element’ is a few thousand industrious Chinamen and perhaps 500 native Californians who do not speak English. The ignorant, hopelessly un-American type of foreigners, which infests and largely controls Eastern cities, is almost unknown here. Poverty and illiteracy do not exist as classes.” California, therefore, represented a refuge, a still distant land of Anglo domination far removed from the problems of modernity.
Seven years later Lummis recapitulated his belief in California’s superiority and the East’s increasing inferiority in a seven-part series titled “The Right Hand of the Continent.” Los Angeles, he asserted, was more eastern than Boston “in nativity, in politics, in standards. It is less [polluted] with foreign elements, and less ruled by them.”

This argument against foreigners formed a key part of Lummis’s attempt to justify Los Angeles to the rest of the nation. He used the region’s climate and its high proportion of Anglo-American immigrants to subvert notions of frontier backwardness. Yet he was not a “knee-jerk” foe of immigration, and, especially during World War I, when anti-German sentiment reached its peak, he spoke out in defense of immigrants. Similarly, he was impressed with the kindness of Italian immigrants, who shared their meager supplies with him during a chilly Colorado night in 1884. He noted, in a calculated insult to the settlers who had turned him away, “I was glad to find one ‘white man’ in this God-forsaken place.”

Here, playing with a common expression of the day, Lummis meant white not only in the racial sense but also as a synonym for honesty and charity.

His fear of immigration melded with a strong opposition to imperialism, an opposition based in his interpretation of American values, economic fears, and racial anxiety. Before and after the Spanish-American War, Lummis attacked his nation’s expansionist zeal, warning that American overseas expansion would lead to unintended consequences. Imperialism, he argued, threatened to destroy the Anglo Eden on the Pacific Coast. It represented a rejection of American values of democracy and self-determination and threatened to bring too many non-white peoples into the United States. In his monthly editorial, he pointed out America’s dismal record on civil rights. Americans had enslaved Africans, treated American Indians poorly, and they “haven’t done much to the Chinese—except exclude, ostracize, blackmail and occasionally mob and murder them.”

Lummis concluded with a warning about imperialism: “And in the face of all this [racial injustice] . . . there are optimistic ninnies who believe we are just the right guardians to adopt a few more millions, from inferior races.”

Rather than racial injustice, the deleterious effect of massive immigration on his adopted state remained his chief concern. Imperialism would mean “the sacrifice of California” because “we cannot keep out nor fine the products of our new ‘possessions,’ which raise the same things that California does.”

Importation of
cheaper crops would hurt California’s economy, but worse was the arrival of cheap, non-white labor: “We cannot shut subjects of the United States out of the United States, as we can—and have been obliged to—the alien Chinese. When we force the unwilling to accept this country as their country, then they must be free in it . . . and the coolies . . . are to come to crowd American farmers. People such as build the homes, which make California the garden of the world, cannot compete with Filipinos.” Imperialism, he warned, would only benefit large corporations and syndicates, and the small farmer would be ruined.  

Lummis, however, remained a strong supporter of Latin American nations and a staunch advocate of self-determination for the peoples of the Americas. He was deeply suspicious of the expansionist designs of men like Theodore Roosevelt, a personal friend and admirer of the editor of *Land of Sunshine*. In a fiery letter to Roosevelt, Lummis complained of the unjust takeover of Panama. He conceded that the nation of Colombia had problems, but the United States also had its faults—chief of which was racial intolerance:

The gravest fault and danger, it seems to me, of the American people—and I mean you, with both hands, for you come as near as I reasonably hope to see any one man to realize what I deem the American type—is that composed, infused and made Strong by every blood on earth, we tend to despise the Other Fellow—as if there were any. We keep up the same old medieval, anti-papist, A.P.A. [American Protective Association], lick of burning ev[ery] man that isn’t one of us. And it is a mistake. As even America is mostly populated with human beings, I hope it is not treason to hold that we may have both dangers and faults.

Explaining Lummis’s contradictory views seems difficult at first. How could he support the expansion of Anglo settlement while defending the native peoples of the Southwest? How could he fear imperialism and still be friendly with Roosevelt, the nation’s preeminent expansionist? How could he defend the rights of immigrants to come to America but crow about how his adopted home was superior because of their absence? Lummis attempted to articulate a vision of place that made sense of these seeming contradictions. California, quite simply, should be a refuge for Anglo whites, a place free of new stock immigrants where non-whites knew their place and added a veneer of exoticism and regional variety.
In terms of the preservation of the special status of Anglos, Californians need not worry about the rise of political machines or slums, which appeared to threaten democracy in eastern cities through manipulation of voting, Lummis believed. Such problems existed in New York, Boston, and other eastern cities where legions of foreigners were easily swayed by the promises of clever politicians. Compared with the flood of immigrants inundating eastern ports, California’s Hispanics, Chinese, and few remaining Indians seemed romantic and thus essentially harmless. Hispanics, while extended citizenship, found themselves deprived of real participation in many ways. Asians and Indians, as non-citizens, exerted no influence in California whatsoever. The sociologist Tomás Almaguer argues that the domination of whites in California “represented the extension of ‘white supremacy’ into the new American Southwest.” This system offered Anglo-Americans a privileged position that immigration in the East increasingly challenged.

Lummis had a sincere appreciation for Hispanic and Indian cultures, but he, like other Los Angeles boomers, actively engaged in constructing an image of Southern California as a refuge for Anglo-Saxons that appropriated elements from California’s Spanish legacy. Lummis was a major figure in what historian William Deverell aptly calls the “whitewashing” of the Hispanic past. By creating a selective, romanticized version of the Mexican past, Anglo Angelenos fashioned a distinct regional identity that promised material comfort and economic growth while simultaneously stripping actual Hispanic peoples of real political and economic power. California’s racial diversity, as Lummis noted, made it far more desirable than the East, in large part because of the small numbers of politically impotent non-whites. These were Lummis’s “few thousand” Chinese and “500 native Californians” and a tiny population of Native Americans, including the “Warner’s Ranch” Indians, a group of a few hundred “mission Indians” Lummis personally helped move to a reservation in Southern California. The balance and supposed racial harmony would, however, fall apart if thousands of peoples of “inferior races” settled in California. The distance from ports of entry on the Eastern Seaboard, fortunately, seemed to preclude that possibility.

Nevertheless, this celebration of Anglo-Saxonism (and its alleged attributes of American democracy, vigorous capitalism, and economic and technological development) masked a profound sense of anxiety. Lummis proved more egalitarian in his views, at least with respect to Hispanics and Native
Americans, but he was no less anxious about the American experiment. He sought to preserve the special place Americans like himself (so-called White Anglo-Saxon Protestants [WASPs]) occupied, and the West seemed like the perfect place to do it.

Lummis’s vision of an Anglo-American West coexisting with the remnants of American Indian culture also resonated with Frank Bird Linderman. For Linderman as for Lummis, the noble but threatened American Indian became his most important literary subject and the focus of much of his political attention. During his long relationship with the Rocky Boy Band
of Cree and Chippewa Indians, he helped them find employment, provided them with clothes, and fought to get a permanent reservation established in Montana. In these battles he revealed his true feelings toward Indians, feelings that demonstrated that he both understood and appreciated Indians in a way most of his fellow Montanans did not.

He fought, for example, to destroy the common belief that Indians were lazy and shiftless, a belief even Linderman’s supporters of the reservation idea held. Montana senator Henry L. Myers argued that the Rocky Boy Indians “from all that I can learn . . . will never work or till the land or support themselves.” He therefore supported the idea of a small reservation for them on the site of an abandoned military reserve near Harve, Montana, because there “they may be corralled, so as to keep them from wandering around over the country aimlessly and bothering people.” Safely removed from the surrounding whites, the band could subsist as best they could on the two townships of land the congressional bill set aside for them. Linderman asserted that the high altitude and infertile character of the land made it unsuitable for agriculture. As for the belief that Indians were lazy, Linderman countered that they had been forced to live in a precarious position, denied their traditional lifeways, and yet kept from participating in the white man’s economy in any meaningful way. They were treated as “renegades” by the people of Helena, on whose outskirts they set up threadbare tents and tepees, and “in a sense were just that, since they had no home, no reservation, no place where they might make a living.” He replied to Senator Myers, “When people are obliged to beg and prowl in alleys, to feed from garbage cans therein, because no one will give them employment, and because all are turned against them on account of their personal appearance and physical condition, it is easy for the onlooker to cry ‘vagabond.’” When given a chance, he asserted, Indians would work as hard as or harder than whites, and, as proof, he cited the story of a Rocky Boy Indian who demanded thirty-five cents an hour for labor performed for Linderman’s friend Dr. Oscar Lanstrum. When Lanstrum complained about the rates, Linderman spoke with the Indian, who told him he worked harder than Lanstrum’s white employee and therefore deserved more money. In the end, the doctor agreed.

Linderman enlisted other eminent Montanans in his scheme to create a reservation for the Rocky Boy Indians, including the famous cowboy artist Charles M. Russell. Like Linderman, Russell played an important role in
conveying the mythic West to Americans and in advocating for the continued presence of Indians in America. At Linderman’s request, Russell wrote to Senator Myers in 1913 in support of Linderman’s proposed reservation: “These people have been on the verge of starvation for years and I think it no more than square for Uncle Sam, who has opened the west to all foreigners, to give these real Americans enough to live on.” Russell, like Linderman and Lummis, believed that Indians, not foreigners, were real Americans and that their noble and romantic culture should be preserved in the face of rapid change. Russell, too, envisioned a white man’s West, a refuge for both Anglo-Americans and colorful and subservient American Indians.

Following a protracted battle over what to do with this small band of Indians, Linderman and his allies finally forced a bill through Congress for the creation of the Rocky Boy Reservation in 1916. Securing a reservation for them, however, was only the beginning, and Linderman continued to press politicians and Indian service bureaucrats for better rations, permission for the Indians to practice traditional dances, such as the forbidden Sun Dance, and for an expansion of the reservation. In a 1933 letter to the reform-minded John Collier, head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, he wrote, “These Indians are real workers, and if encouraged and helped will prove to the doubters that the red man has a future even in the white man’s scheme of things.” They needed more land to be successful, he believed, to prove themselves.

As a result of Linderman’s endless skirmishes with bureaucrats, he earned the Indians’ friendship. John Evans, a Harve harness maker friendly to the Indians, wrote Linderman to tell him about the compliment paid him by Day Child, a tribal elder at Rocky Boy. He quoted Day Child as saying, “I want you to know how I like Frank Linderman. My father is dead. I loved him, but if my father came back and stood on one hill and I saw Frank Linderman on another hill I would not go to my father. I would go to Frank Linderman. You know I do not lie, this is the truth.” Though filtered through Evans and no doubt intended to flatter Linderman, Day Child’s comments reflected the Rocky Boy Band’s gratitude for his repeated help and counsel and the important role he played in winning some semblance of security for them.

Linderman’s views on both Indians and modern society found expression in his literary works, most notably his biographies of two significant Crow elders, Chief Plenty Coups and Pretty-shield. Plenty Coup’s story was published in 1930 under the title *American: The Life Story of a Great Indian,*
Figure 4.3. Charles M. Russell dressed as an Indian. Russell embraced and celebrated plains Indian culture in his paintings in a way no other artist had. For Russell, Indians represented a rugged and vanishing America. At Linderman’s request Russell wrote to Montana senator Henry L. Myers in support of creating a reservation for the Rocky Boy Band of Cree and Chippewa Indians. Courtesy, Frank Bird Linderman Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula.
Plenty Coups, Chief of the Crows, while his biography of Pretty-shield, originally titled Red Mother, appeared in 1932. The two works marked the pinnacle of Linderman’s literary success. These aging figures were, to Linderman, authentic Indians who recalled the time before the white men came in numbers and dispossessed them of their lands. In comparison, Linderman wrote that younger Indians “know next to nothing about their people’s ancient ways.” In keeping with his belief in a vanished era he asserted, “The real Indians are gone.”

According to historian Sherry L. Smith, Linderman’s choice of titles for his biographies reflected his inner fears and beliefs. The titles of the works “underscore Linderman’s theme of a vanishing world,” not only for Indians “but also one where red-blooded, Anglo-Saxon Americans held supreme against immigrants and one where women knew their place as mothers rather than as congresswomen.” The modern world, with its problems
(not the least of which was his congressional defeat by Jeanette Rankin), made the world of the Indians all the more desirable and its passing all the more mournful. He summed up his perspective in the title of one of his works: *On a Passing Frontier.* Through his writing career and his political activism, Linderman attempted to preserve some of the West of his memory, but increasingly the transformation going on in Montana challenged his memories of Indians, trappers, and the untrammeled wilderness of the territorial period.

Dirty, industrial, and peopled by hordes of inferior immigrants, Montana’s mining towns, like Butte, represented everything he hated about modern existence. Yet despite his best efforts, the modern world pulled him in, and in 1892 the would-be frontiersman had to abandon his anachronistic sojourn as a trapper and find more stable and remunerative employment. He had fallen in love and required a steady paycheck so he could marry and start a family. Linderman worked for a time in Raville and then moved on to the bustling, polluted town of Butte, where he worked for the Butte and Boston Smelter as an assayer and chemist. He described his first night on the job as hellish, filled with “clouds of bluish-green sulphur fumes that inflamed my throat and irritated my nose almost beyond endurance.”

Linderman’s job required him to weigh loads of steaming calcine, a near-molten substance produced in the smelters. His first shift ended with a conflict between himself and a man who refused to weigh his loads, in flagrant violation of the orders of the mine’s superintendent. The man was an Italian, which for Linderman was significant. After a brief scuffle with the man, Linderman won, but he was fired for his trouble.

His dislike for immigrant miners extended well beyond this one encounter. He variously described Butte’s Italians, Welsh, Austrian, Cornish, and Irish miners as drunks, rabble-rousers, wife beaters, and stooges for a variety of fraternal, political, and reform efforts. He loathed his coworkers at another job in the mining industry, this time as an ash wheeler, an easy job populated by the mining company’s professional musicians when their musical skills were not needed. Most of his coworkers were immigrants, and he loathed one in particular. Nicknamed “Joe-joe, the dog-faced one,” Linderman described him as ape-like, deformed, and with a blank and vapid expression. His dislike of the “clownish hornblower” grew after the homely musician’s negligence caused the death of a highly trained horse when it fell into an ore bin.
Indeed, the foreign element in Butte finally drove Linderman away in search of, literally, greener pastures. Linderman and his family “wished to get away from Butte, where there were no trees, not even a blade of grass.” Polluted air and hordes of rough immigrants marked the antithesis of everything he had hoped to find in Montana. He described his neighborhood as unsatisfying, in part because “English was scarcely ever heard there” and Austrian miners swore and sang outside a nearby bar at all hours of the night.58 Vowing never to force his children to live without being able to play “beneath leafy trees,” Linderman decided to leave Butte and its motley population.59

The trapper-turned-assayer, however, found it more difficult than he hoped to leave the mining industry behind, but gradually he established a freelance assaying business and a newspaper and eventually became a politician and an insurance agent. He did not forget his dislike of immigrants. In a letter on the quality of beans the US government furnished to the Rocky Boy Indians he quipped, “I have always maintained that it was mighty hard to recognize the ‘noble Roman’ in a Dago organ grinder, and it is equally hard to recognize an edible bean in the black eyed specimens I forwarded you.”60

Linderman most feared the threat immigrants posed to the survival of the nation. Anti-immigrationist sentiment grew to a crescendo in the 1920s and Linderman led the chorus, at least in Montana. In a letter to Gertrude Atherton, he praised her article in Bookman because it would help draw attention to Madison Grant’s The Passing of the Great Race, whose thesis argued that the superior Anglo-Saxon race found itself on the losing end of population growth to more fertile, cowardly immigrants, while World War I and the Anglo martial spirit culled the best young men. As he explained to Atherton, “We have not only permitted immigration to injure our country but through apathy have allowed our children’s birthright of opportunity to be filched from them.” The decline in America’s character was obvious: “The great change that has come over our country within the last fifty years is startling indeed to those who think and American ideals are being dimmed or lost in the rabble from other lands.”61 The solution, Linderman told Senator Myers, was “stopping immigration, or at least sharply restricting it.” Speaking out against immigration in Montana, he cautioned, would be dangerous, but nevertheless he had “made twenty-four addresses only one or two of which were entirely public. I think you will understand me.”62 Immigrants and the political machines they supported would destroy America. Linderman,
pondering a run for the US Senate, confided to a friend, “The Sinn Fein element would fight me to a stand still although I believe I could beat them.” His reference to Sinn Fein, the Irish nationalist movement, showed once again his revulsion for immigrants and the power they wielded in American politics. His assertion that he could defeat them turned out to be incorrect, as his narrow loss in the 1924 election showed.

Lummis and Linderman represented but two of the many who sought to protect true whiteness while also reserving a space for American Indians. Their efforts at contacting Indian peoples and learning about their cultures were part of a larger effort by ethnologists to understand Indian peoples and offer them up as paragons of a better, more authentic existence that differed from the increasing mechanization and alienation of modern society. As Americans entered the twentieth century with the frontier experience behind them, they turned increasingly to a mythological past and contact with a primitive, but less alienating and more invigorating and genuine, nature. Worried that future generations of Americans, men especially, would grow weak and morally bankrupt, reformers like Daniel Carter Beard and Ernest Thompson Seton sought to put children in touch with the natural world. They could thus learn skills like self-reliance, cooperation, and survival, which would create better, more confident Americans.

Beard turned to America’s frontier past for inspiration, creating the Sons of Daniel Boone in 1905, while Seton created the Woodcraft Indians. For Beard, Indians were the antagonists, the obstacles Americans faced in taming the West, but Seton found in them avatars of a better existence. The historian Philip Deloria argues that Seton grasped the complicated and contradictory impulses of modernity better than did Beard. Beard advocated that young people emulate the pioneer experience and act like frontiersman, but such advice no longer seemed applicable in a modern industrial age. Seton, however, did not want people to reject modernity or live by outmoded methods. Instead, he wanted them to be modern by encountering the primitive. Deloria writes that this experience represented a “break not only historically [as in Beard’s approach], but also racially, socially, and developmentally.” Indian peoples, unlike the frontiersman of Daniel Boone’s era, still existed and, Seton hoped, remained largely unsullied by the evils of modernity. Ethnologists, by living with and observing Indian peoples, could then popularize supposedly authentic views of Indians, stressing their values
and morals as examples for children to emulate and thereby enabling young Americans to engage this other world and emerge from the experience better and stronger people.

Similarly, the Camp Fire Girls used images of Indians to inculcate middle-class notions of gender into young women, stressing child care, cooking, and crafts. Children, unlike adults, could easily cross from modern society into primitive culture because they remained childlike and unaware of societal expectations and conventions, allowing them to play the role of noble savage. Playing Indian and dressing in Indian-inspired costumes helped open this world to them. As with childhood itself, children could not remain in such a world forever. While the experience with the primitive and Indian culture would fade, the lessons would linger long after the children had become adults.

Playing Indian embodied many contradictory impulses. Having children dress and act like Indians to experience nature and the primitive so they could become good modern people is one example. Another contradiction came from acting like the people defeated by the United States to demonstrate loyalty to the United States. Indeed, playing Indian had long featured in American culture. As early as 1775, American colonists, by choosing to dress as Indians during the famous Boston Tea Party, asserted a uniquely American identity for themselves. Deloria writes, “As England became a them for colonists, Indians became an us.” Nearly a century and a half later, as writers like Lummis and Linderman denounced immigrants as indigestible and undesirable, immigrants themselves used Indian imagery to assert an American identity.

These contradictions, between modern and primitive, savage and civilized, foreign and native, embodied the larger struggle to define the meaning of America in a radically changing world. Lummis and Linderman, like many Americans, used whiteness as the standard to judge other people. Lummis, for example, had slighted the rude Coloradans by writing that the only “white man” he’d found in the area was a kind and generous Italian immigrant. Being white, in this case, meant treating others with respect and courtesy—something the settlers in Colorado refused to do, thinking that the roving newspaperman was a bandit perhaps. Nevertheless, the only hospitable person he found was an Italian immigrant, and, Lummis noted, the Italians as a group did not have the best reputation.

Linderman also used whiteness as shorthand for respectable and moral. Describing one of his trapping partners as a rough and dangerous man, prone
to violent drinking binges, Linderman observed, “Though apt to be quarrelsome,” the trapper “was always ‘white’ with me.”

Similarly, in a discussion of labor problems in Butte-area mines in the wake of labor violence in the mines of Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, Linderman’s boss at the Helena and Victor Mining Company, A. Sterne Blake, declared that sabotage would not happen in Butte because “there are some white men in our crew of miners, old-timers who would hang a dynamiter as quick as we would.”

Being “white” meant being responsible, moral, intelligent, and, in the latter case, truly American.

Linderman went west in search of a vanishing world, a place where still-free Indians mingled with rough trappers in a beautiful landscape of open plains and towering peaks. Instead of these romantic scenes, however, the new industrial West was a place of toxic smelters and lawless, un-American rabble. Filled with nostalgia, he did what he could to preserve the past, writing books about “authentic” Indians who had not succumbed to the temptations and vices of the white man’s civilization and doing his best to preserve Indian culture by helping to secure a reservation for the Rocky Boy Band of Cree and Chippewa Indians. Perhaps these efforts would never be completely successful, but Linderman felt it was worth a try. Charles Fletcher Lummis envisioned a slightly different world. In his world Hispanics, Indians, and even the Chinese could find a place in society, but that place was circumscribed. Certainly, Lummis proved more progressive on issues of race than Linderman, or nearly any of his contemporaries for that matter, but he, too, harbored romantic notions of genuine Indians and Hispanics. In addition, like Linderman, he sought to limit the power and influence of immigrants to the region, in large part because, unlike the Indians, Hispanics, and Chinese in California and the Southwest, European immigrants represented a direct threat to the culture Lummis desired to build. In the end, both men employed whiteness as a tool to shape the West in accordance with their visions.

Their efforts culminated a process of imagining the West as a refuge for Anglo-Americans. Taken as a whole, the West had undergone a reimagining throughout the nineteenth century. Early explorers questioned the compatibility of the arid, open, savage area for Anglo-American settlement. Later, some critics feared that the region was too pleasant for racial vigor, but by the end of the century westerners like Lummis argued that the region offered an ideal homeland for superior but increasingly beleaguered Anglo-Americans. The West, they argued, offered a last opportunity for a meaningful and
authentic life, free from the alienating evils of industrial society. This imagining of the region provided a vision and intellectual basis that justified the real creation of the white man’s West. Concomitant with this intellectual exercise was the process of physically transforming the West into the imagined refuge of Anglo-Americans. Western promoters and visionaries would employ the legal system, advertising, religious zeal, and finally violence in an effort to bring the white man’s West into existence. While never complete, their vision would nonetheless become something of a reality.

Notes

1. Rothman employed the term in his discussion of tourism, but the idea is appropriate, I believe, for the way people come to identify themselves as westerners. See Hal K. Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998).


4. Ibid.


6. Ibid., 95–96.


8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., 183.

10. Ibid., 17.


12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 9.


20. Ibid., 249–50.


26. Charles Fletcher Lummis, Land of Sunshine 13, no. 6 (November 1900), 336.

27. Charles Fletcher Lummis, “In the Lion’s Den,” Land of Sunshine 13, no. 3 (August 1900), 182–88, quote is on 185.

28. Lummis, Tramp across the Continent, 74.


33. Lummis’s defense of German immigrants as true Americans is best articulated in his weekly column in the Los Angeles Times, variously titled “Chile con Carnage,” “I Know So,” “I Guess So,” and “I Wonder.” The column became a victim of
wartime paper shortages (and perhaps of Lummis’s outspoken opposition to the war); see Thompson, *American Character*, 293.

34. Lummis, *Letters from the Southwest*, 92.


36. Ibid.

37. Charles Fletcher Lummis, “In the Lion’s Den,” *Land of Sunshine* 12, no. 3 (February 1900): 193.

38. Charles Fletcher Lummis to Theodore Roosevelt, January 15, 1904, MS.1.1.3805D, Braun Research Library, Southwest Museum, Autry National Center, Los Angeles, CA.


40. Ibid., 7.


43. Senator Henry L. Myers to Frank Bird Linderman, February 1, 1916, Box 1, Folder 19, Frank Bird Linderman Collection, Museum of the Plains Indian, Brown- ing, MT (hereafter FBLMPI).

44. Ibid.


46. Frank Bird Linderman to Senator Henry L. Myers, February 8, 1916, Box 1, Folder 19, FBLMPI.

47. Ibid. The story is also recounted in Linderman, *Montana Adventure*, 141. In the published version Linderman does not name Oscar Lanstrum as the employer.

48. Charles M. Russell to Senator Henry L. Myers, January 11, 1913, Box 1, Folder 27, FBLMPI.


50. Frank Bird Linderman to John Collier, September 25, 1933, Box 1, Folder 5, FBLMPI.

51. John Evans to Frank Bird Linderman, June 10, 1925, Box 1, Folder 13, FBLMPI.


55. Ibid., 88–89.
56. Ibid. See examples on 89, 92–93, 95–98.
57. Ibid., 109–10.
58. Ibid., 107.
59. Ibid., 109.
60. Frank Bird Linderman to Cato Sells, March 16, 1917, Box 1, Folder 28, FBLMPI.
61. Frank Bird Linderman to Mrs. Gertrude Atherton, March 9, 1922, Box 1, Folder 4, Series I, Frank Bird Linderman Collection (Mss. 7), K. Ross Toole Archive, Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula (hereafter FBLML). Linderman was a fan of Grant’s book because he apparently sent a copy to Senator Henry L. Myers. See Myers’s response dated December 2, 1920, Box 3, Folder 19, Series II, FBLML.
62. Frank Bird Linderman to Senator Henry L. Myers, March 23, 1922, Box 3, Folder 19, FBLML.
63. Frank Bird Linderman to P. A. Morrison, April 29, 1922, Box 3, Folder 16, FBLML.
65. Ibid., 115–20.
66. Ibid., 22.
68. Lummis, Letters from the Southwest, 92.
69. Linderman, Montana Adventure, 35.
70. Ibid., 85.