

Indian Warriors and Pioneer Mothers: American Identity and the Closing of the Frontier in Public Monuments, 1890-1930.

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Abstract

At the end of the 19th century, Americans heralded the end of the westward march. The historian Frederick Jackson Turner put it best when in 1893 he proclaimed the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, "closed the first period of American history." Long understood as a geographic divide between "civilized" and "savage" would determine the fate of America's future. Previous scholars, in examining the work of artists, writers, entertainers, individuals fashioned a nostalgic legacy of western expansion at this moment. This dissertation opens new territory in this field by exploring how Americans nationwide fashioned a new understanding of the nation's defining legend, the myth of the frontier, and how it is based. By employing the Smithsonian Institution American Art Museum

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examine the entire range of public monuments commemorating western expansion. This work provides an unprecedented synthesis on this topic. Inventory research revealed one strikingly overwhelming figure, the Indian and the pioneer. It also led to one combatant in the battle for the continent in the 19th century, both figures who were the foundation upon which citizens would construct the western century. Thus, in a series of case studies complementing my Smithsonian Inventory, I explore the life of two mythic American figures, the Indian and the pioneer, and how they were the foundation upon which citizens would construct the western century in a rich array of artifacts including public sculptures, monuments, and buildings.

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