



## George Catlin and His Indian Gallery – Classroom Activities

### Catlin’s Quest: Choices and Consequences

When George Catlin (1796–1872), a young lawyer and struggling portrait painter, saw a delegation of Native Americans from the Far West in Philadelphia in the late 1820s, he was inspired to embark on a new career. Admiring the Indians’ grace and dignity—“arrayed and equipped in all their classical beauty”—and believing that their way of life was fast disappearing, he determined that “nothing short of loss of my life shall prevent me from visiting their country and becoming their historian.”<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 1830, with rolls of canvas, an easel, and a case of fish bladders filled with oil colors, Catlin set out to fulfill his mission. Over the next six years he journeyed thousands of miles and painted hundreds of portraits and scenes of Indian life.

Catlin turned showman after 1837, touring the East Coast and Europe with his collection of paintings, costumes, weapons, and household artifacts. He called it the “Indian Gallery.” Hoping that Congress would eventually purchase his collection for the nation, Catlin borrowed heavily to finance his travels and the publication of his writings. When the Indian Gallery ceased to be a popular attraction in the 1850s, however, debts overwhelmed him. Joseph Harrison, a wealthy Philadelphian, paid the artist’s creditors in 1852 and took possession of the collection.

In his old age, the artist lived and painted in a room in the Smithsonian Institution’s Castle. Following Catlin’s death, about 445 paintings from the Indian Gallery were donated by Harrison’s widow to the Institution in 1879 and are now in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

### Resources

- *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery* educators’ packet:
  - Artworks & captions (particularly on pages 1, 2, 3, 7, 14, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, and 27).
  - Reproduction of *Batiste and I Running Buffalo, Mouth of the Yellowstone* by George Catlin.
  - Letter No. 1, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians* by George Catlin
  - Letter No. 31, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians* by George Catlin

- Website – <http://CatlinClassroom.si.edu>
  - Catlin’s Quest Campfire Story
  - Lesson Plans (<http://catlinclassroom.si.edu/lessonplans/contents.html>)
  - Search ([http://catlinclassroom.si.edu/catlin\\_collectionsearchform.cfm](http://catlinclassroom.si.edu/catlin_collectionsearchform.cfm))

### Suggested Activities

#### Decisions, Decisions: Research and Discussion Questions

Discuss the decisions made by Catlin and the impact on his life and his family. Grade level appropriate research and report assignments might address the following questions:

- What was Catlin’s initial career choice? What considerations influenced Catlin’s choice? Do these same factors apply today? Consider discussing personal responsibilities to self and family, personal goals and ambitions, and aptitude within the available career/work environment.
- How did preparations for careers in law and art differ in the early 1800s? Which career was more practical? More satisfying? Consider discussing the practicality of certain contemporary careers such as professional athlete or entertainer.
- Was Philadelphia a good location for artists? Why did Catlin leave Philadelphia? Consider discussing how some occupations require hardships that have consequences for others.
- Was Catlin’s approach to the documentation of Native Americans consistent with the prevailing attitudes of American society? Consider discussing the concept of science prevalent in Catlin’s time and how those notions compare with those of today’s diverse global society.
- Did Catlin’s decision to put on “wild west” shows affect his reputation as a serious artist-ethnographer? Was George Catlin a credible source of information about the West and Native Americans? Consider discussing how credibility is earned and maintained in contemporary society.
- Did national feelings toward Native Americans affect the profitability of Catlin’s enterprises? How and why did public attitudes in Europe differ from those in the United States? Consider discussing the relationship between commercial enterprise and popular attitudes.

#### Activities: The Road Not Taken

Ask the students to create a decision tree (or other graphic representation familiar to them) depicting Catlin’s life using nodes to represent significant decisions. Ask the students to augment the decision tree by adding paths that represent possible outcomes of alternative decisions.

Create a grade level appropriate writing assignment such as a journal entry, letter, newspaper article, etc., that reflects a possible alternative outcome given a different decision.

Ask students to imagine that they are artists on one of these alternative paths. Using grade appropriate materials, have the students create a portrait of someone encountered on the alternative path.

### Contradictions

George Catlin was appalled at the destruction of the great herds of plains buffalo; yet he personally delighted in the excitement of the buffalo hunt. Show the students *Batiste and I Running Buffalo, Mouth of the Yellowstone* and ask them to speculate on the reasons Catlin participated in buffalo hunts. Turn the ensuing discussion to behaviors in which the students engage that might be harmful to themselves, others, or the environment.

Catlin proposed creation of a national park

where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse, ... amid the fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes. ... A *nation's* Park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty! <sup>2</sup>

Discuss the possibility and appropriateness of providing environments where indigenous populations can live “unspoiled” by contact with “civilization.” Grade level appropriate research and report assignments might address the following questions:

- What is the evidence that some Native Americans wished to remain in isolation from Europeans and Euro-Americans? Did all Native Americans wish to remain isolated? Consider comparing and contrasting the reactions of various Indian nations such as the Cherokee and the Sioux.
- What motivated Europeans and Euro-Americans to move west and/or interact with Native Americans? Consider discussing the significance of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.
- Which interactions between Native Americans and Europeans/Euro-Americans caused significant changes in Native American life? Consider discussing how the fur trade changed hunting practice and how whiskey was used as a trade good.

Catlin's suggestion to create a park that included the Native American as a “specimen” can be unfavorably interpreted, yet Catlin was often viewed as an “Indian lover.”

I love a people who have always made me welcome to the best they had ... who are honest without laws, who have no jails and no poor-house ... who never take the name of God in vain ... who worship God without a Bible, and I believe that God loves them also ... who are free

from religious animosities ... who have never raised a hand against me, or stolen my property, where there was no law to punish either ... who never fought a battle with white men except on their own ground ... and oh! How I love a people who don't live for the love of money.<sup>3</sup>

Catlin admired the Indian, yet his solution would, in effect, imprison them. What cultural forces influenced Catlin to adopt such a perspective? Consider discussing the influence of Charles Willson Peale and the ideas associated with the Victorian Age, particularly those of biologist Herbert Spencer.

## Ancestral Lands

Catlin presented one of the last looks at American Indians living in a place under their control—before European American views about private land ownership affected Indians in the West. He described lifestyles based on the communal use of lands, undivided and without boundaries, settlement or cultivation. While he expressed hope that the government would not be a party to taking their lands from them, Catlin realized that westward migration of Euro-Americans was inevitable.

Native Americans were bought out, coerced, and otherwise encouraged to leave ancestral lands and relocate to reservations. In 1830, at the urging of Andrew Jackson, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act leading to forced removal of Native Americans living east of the Mississippi River to Indian territory.

### Resources

- *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery* educators' packet:
  - Artworks & captions (particularly on pages 5, 10, 12, 15, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, and 25).
  - Reproduction of *River Bluffs, 1,320 Miles above St. Louis* by George Catlin.
  - Letter No. 1, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians* by George Catlin
  - Red Jacket's speech to Mr. Richardson, 1811
- Website – <http://CatlinClassroom.si.edu>
  - Ancestral Lands Campfire Story
  - Lesson Plans (<http://catlinclassroom.si.edu/lessonplans/contents.html>)
  - Search ([http://catlinclassroom.si.edu/catlin\\_collectionsearchform.cfm](http://catlinclassroom.si.edu/catlin_collectionsearchform.cfm))
- Website - First Inaugural Address of Andrew Jackson (<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/presiden/inaug/jackson1.htm>)
- Website – Second Inaugural Address of Andrew Jackson (<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/presiden/inaug/jackson2.htm>)

### Suggested Activities

#### The Vast West

In preparation for this activity, assign grade level appropriate reading about the naturalist philosopher such as *Essays* by Francis Bacon and *An Essay Concerning Human*

*Understanding* by John Locke. Biographies of naturalists such as John James Audubon or works by James Fenimore Cooper from the *Leatherstocking* series, which place a romantic emphasis on the natural and primitive may be more appropriate for younger students.

Show the students *River Bluffs, 1,320 Miles above St. Louis* and ask them to provide “naturalistic” observations. Younger students might be asked to create a “field journal” to record their observations.

Discuss the scale and perspective. Does the landscape appear vast or of limited size? Discuss the Native American depicted in the foreground. Does the figure dominate the landscape? What does the presence of a lone native suggest?

Older students might discuss the influence of transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau or Hudson River painters, such as Thomas Cole, who shaped a mythos of the American landscape as a new Garden of Eden consisting of majestic vistas. Discuss how depictions of the unspoiled splendor of northeastern mountains and rivers contrasted with the effects of industrialization. What is the natural state depicted by Catlin?

#### Understanding through Simulation

At first the U.S. government dealt with the indigenous peoples of North America as sovereign nation-states, concluding treaties in much the same manner as with European states. A treaty between the United States and the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, signed on November 11, 1794, pledged peace between the United States and the Six Nations. Catlin’s first Native American portrait was of Red Jacket, a Seneca chief and orator who had spoken at the treaty negotiations.



Publisher: McKenney and Hall, 1836–1844  
Lithographer: Courbould  
Printer: C. Hallmandel  
Copy after Charles Bird King, 1785–1862  
*Red Jacket, Seneca War Chief*  
about 1837–1844  
Hand-colored lithograph  
19 5/8 x 13 5/8 in.  
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase

Subsequently, the U.S. military, New York State government, and land speculators treated native lands as though they were within U.S. borders. In 1810, the Ogden Land Company obtained the rights to purchase the Seneca lands in Western New York. Red Jacket met with Mr. Richardson, Ogden’s agent, in 1811. Red Jacket told Richardson that the Seneca were given the land by the Great Spirit and that they expected to deal directly with the U.S. government. In 1822, Ogden took advantage of difficulties between traditional Seneca and newly converted Christian Seneca, and convinced the converts to sell their land and move to Wisconsin. In 1827, Ogden began selling this land.<sup>4</sup>

### Treaty Monopoly

In advance, prepare Monopoly game sets (or a grade appropriate alternative) for a number of games, each with three three-player teams.

Instruct that one group of students will explore concepts of land ownership through a new version of Monopoly while another group will work on research (or some other task of your choosing). Divide the class into two groups with a ratio of nine (group 1) to one (group 2). Divide each group of nine students into teams of three, and assigning three teams to each board, ask them to begin playing Monopoly.

After each team has acquired several properties, bring back students from group 2, one at a time. As each group 2 student enters the room the teacher will negotiate a treaty between the

newcomer and one member of a team. The outcome of each negotiation will be that the negotiator on the team will receive some amount of cash; the newcomer will receive all property belonging to the team, and the entire team will be moved to one of the other Monopoly boards to begin again with their cash allotment. Continue with treaty negotiations until all of the original teams are playing on a single board, and their places at the other boards have been taken by single students from group 2.

It may be unnecessary (or impossible) to complete the integration, as the displaced students may complain and interrupt the exercise. When students are ready, discuss the dynamics of these “treaty negotiations.” Explore the parallels between the authority of the teacher and the U.S. government, and the communal nature of a team versus the rights of an individual member of that team.

### Andrew Jackson and Osceola

In 1814 Andrew Jackson, commanding U.S. Army forces in Alabama and Georgia against the Creek nation, appropriated over twenty million acres of land from Native Americans. Many displaced Creeks migrated southward into Spanish Florida joining descendents of the many *yat'siminoli* tribes who had resisted Spanish conquest. Euro-Americans began to call all Florida Indians Seminole. In 1817–1818, the U.S. Army, led by Jackson, invaded Spanish Florida and fought against the Seminole and the runaway African slaves who had taken refuge there. These battles became known as the First Seminole War. In 1821 Spain sold Florida to the United States.

By 1830, Jackson had been elected President, and had signed the Indian Removal Act. This legislation allowed the President to reserve land west of the Mississippi River and exchange it for Native American land in the East. Native Americans who did not wish to relocate would become citizens of their home state.



*Osceola's Mode of Signing the Treaty*  
R. J. Hamerton, Zinc.  
Published by Hatchard & Son,  
Piccadilly  
Courtesy Florida State Archives

Seminole leaders were induced to sign the Treaty of Payne's Landing in 1832, providing for Seminole chiefs to travel to Indian Territory to inspect proposed tribal lands reserved for them. A popular story says that Osceola, a Seminole warrior, drove his knife into the treaty vowing that the Seminole would never leave Florida. Subsequently, under suspicious circumstances, the chiefs visiting reserved lands agreed to relocate within three years. The Second Seminole War, the most costly Indian war in dollars and loss of life, began in 1835 when Osceola reportedly killed General Wiley Thompson. Using their knowledge of the climate and the landscape, the Seminoles conducted a guerrilla war. After several years of conflict, public pressure increased to successfully end the war and frustrated U.S. Army commanders resorted to dishonorable tactics to achieve their ends. In 1837 General Thomas Jessup induced Osceola to meet under a flag of truce. Jessup arrested Osceola and imprisoned him at Fort Moultrie in South Carolina. To this day no official peace treaty was made and the Seminoles are the only tribe that never surrendered to the U.S. government.

Historical perspectives on this period of North American history can be gained by grade level appropriate biographical research into the lives of Andrew Jackson and Osceola.

Research and Discussion Questions:

- What was Jackson's perception of the Seminoles? Consider discussing his experience in the U.S. Army and the influence of Jeffersonian Republicanism.
- In what ways were Jackson and Catlin similar? Consider discussing elements in the social environment mentioned above.
- Why wasn't Osceola a chief of the Seminoles? Consider discussing the consequences of the Seminole policy of providing refuge for and integrating runaway slaves.

Although relocation west of the Mississippi River was supposed to be voluntary, removal became mandatory whenever the U.S. government felt it was necessary. To many people in the North, Indian removal was viewed as an outrage committed by slave owning southerners.

## The Western Landscape

When Catlin went west in 1830 the average easterner and the interested European had only a vague and confused impression of the country beyond the Mississippi. In his journals Catlin talked about the great expanses of the West—the breadth of the plains, the distance to the horizon, the vastness of the sky. The concept of space here was different from the one held by inhabitants in the forested regions of the East. The grasses seen by Catlin had adapted to low levels of rainfall and at that time supported vast herds of buffalo, elk, goats, sheep, wolves, bear, and varieties of birds. Catlin wrote at length about the animals he encountered. The prairie once spread across 1.5 million square kilometers of the Great Plains.

### Resources

- *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery* educators' packet:
  - Artworks & captions (particularly on pages 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, and 16).
  - Reproduction of *Buffalo Bulls Fighting in Running Season, Upper Missouri* by George Catlin.
  - Letter No. 31, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians* by George Catlin.
- Website – <http://CatlinClassroom.si.edu>
  - Western Landscape Campfire Story
  - Lesson Plans (<http://catlinclassroom.si.edu/lessonplans/contents.html>)
  - Search ([http://catlinclassroom.si.edu/catlin\\_collectionsearchform.cfm](http://catlinclassroom.si.edu/catlin_collectionsearchform.cfm))
- Website – U.S.D.A. Roadless Area Conservation pages (<http://roadless.fs.fed.us/>)

### Suggested Activities

#### The Buffalo

The buffalo transfixed Catlin by its massive physical size as well as its behavior. Modern efforts to restore the bison population have led to the current increased numbers on Indian reservations, within parks, and in other wildlife sanctuaries.

Ask the students to read Letter No. 31, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians* by George Catlin, particularly the sections that detail the enormity of buffalo herds at the time. Show the students *Buffalo Bulls Fighting in Running Season, Upper Missouri*. Discuss the correlation between the text in Letter No. 31

and artwork. Are the buffalo in a single clump or does the herd extend to the horizon and beyond the sides of the picture plane? What is not included in the picture (i.e., there are no humans or human structures). Ask the students to estimate the number of buffalo and the acreage depicted.

Although based on extrapolation from reports by settlers, author and lecturer, Ernest Seton's 1910 estimate of 65 million bison prior to settlement<sup>5</sup> was widely accepted until recently. Contemporary analysis using Geographic Information Systems estimates the historic bison population between 20 and 44 million.<sup>6</sup> By the late 1880s the buffalo was nearly extinct, with total U.S. population estimated at less than 1,500. The current U.S. bison population is estimated to be about 250,000. Students can use grade appropriate exercises to grasp the significance of the above numbers. Older students can research carrying capacity of prairie biomes, calculate available acreage, and solve for an upper limit of a sustainable population. Younger students can use paper clips or other physical objects to practice estimation skills.

### Interdependence: Discussion & Research Questions

Bison co-evolved with the American grasslands, which once covered about 40 percent of the nation's surface. Shaped by the natural selective pressures in the Great Plains environment, bison thrived on native grasses and the intact ecosystem that produced those grasses.

Discuss the concept of interdependence. Grade level appropriate research and report assignments might address the following questions:

- What happens when an herbivore or a natural predator is removed from an ecosystem? Consider discussing food webs and trophic pyramids.
- What are some examples of unintended consequences of changes in agricultural practices? Consider discussing the introduction of barbed-wire fences, and the use of DDT, and deforestation.
- What happens when the effects of fire and other natural phenomenon are mitigated? Consider discussing the current forest fire situation in the United States.
- What is a "sustainable" ecosystem? What did Buckminster Fuller mean when he coined the term "spaceship earth?" Consider discussing energy cycles, the soil cycle, the carbon cycle, and the water cycle.

Recognizing that Native Americans depended upon the buffalo for survival, Catlin explained the many uses they had for the animal. Ask the students to compare and contrast Native American and early Euro-American perspectives on the natural world. Catlin's observations and experiences with the fur companies and traders are scattered throughout his writings and

give a first-hand account of the forts, the people involved, and the impact fur trading had on the lives of the Indians. Discuss the ecological significance of the fur companies.

### It's About Dirt

Indigenous prairie grasses have deep root systems that keep the soil from blowing away. The Homestead Act of 1862 gave a pioneer family 160 acres of “public land” if they would farm it for five years. With the promise of free land, thousands of settlers moved to the prairie, and practiced farming techniques that had been successful in the temperate deciduous forest biome of the eastern United States. Subsequently, about one third of the topsoil in the western lands has eroded.

### Activity: Land Use Role Playing

Government policy often has unintended consequences—such as the “Dust Bowl.” Creation of public policy is a difficult task involving legitimate competing constituencies. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service offers a good example of this complexity. Ask students to review and report on Roadless Area Conservation policy documented at <http://roadless.fs.fed.us/index.shtml>. Assign students to small groups that represent various constituencies in a public land policy situation, real or imagined. Local zoning controversies will provide a source of meaningful scenarios. Groups can present their perspective by creating letters to the editor, debating, or conducting a mock trial.

Similar policy decisions involve strip mining, clear cutting, and conversion of rain forest to agricultural use. Land use policy is often framed as conservation versus jobs; however, carrying capacity, loss of biodiversity, and matters of equitable distribution are also issues.

Thomas Robert Malthus, publishing the first edition of the *Essay on Population* in 1798, is usually credited with the pessimistic view that population had a tendency to outrun the available food supply and was held in check by vice and misery. The famous bet between economist, Julian Simon, and ecologist, Paul Ehrlich, highlights the relative positions of opposite contemporary perspectives on carrying capacity. Ask students to read John Tierney’s New York Times article describing the bet and the respective positions. (available online: <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~bkench/Betting.htm>) Since Simon won the bet, is Ehrlich wrong? If Ehrlich is correct, the earth may be reaching the limits of agricultural expansion.

## Chiefs & Leaders

Catlin met and painted Indians famous in American history. Men such as Black Hawk and Osceola were players in a fierce struggle to retain their native lands. Catlin also met and painted men of prominence in their tribes who were still in control of their ancestral lands. The Mandan chief Four Bears and Buffalo Bull=s Back Fat, head chief of the Blood Tribe, are little recognized in written history, but they are remembered in the oral literature of their tribes as powerful leaders.

### Resources

- *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery* educators' packet:
  - Artworks & captions (particularly on pages 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 24 and 25).
  - Reproduction of *Four Bears, Second Chief, in Full Dress* by George Catlin.
- Website – <http://CatlinClassroom.si.edu>
  - Chiefs & Leaders Campfire Story
  - Lesson Plans (<http://catlinclassroom.si.edu/lessonplans/contents.html>)
  - Search ([http://catlinclassroom.si.edu/catlin\\_collectionsearchform.cfm](http://catlinclassroom.si.edu/catlin_collectionsearchform.cfm))
- Website – Northern Illinois University Black Hawk War pages (<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/blackhawk/index.html>)

### Power Shirts

Catlin met Plains Indians organized into many different tribes, each having a unique culture. To protect themselves and assure their peoples' survival, tribes had developed a class of soldiers called warriors. Successful warriors received great honor, gained much esteem, and held elevated positions within the tribe. One acknowledgment and reward for great military deeds earned by successful warriors was the privilege of wearing specially made shirts and leggings that proclaimed their accomplishments and lofty status. Catlin carefully described the dress and decoration of these warriors, how they reflected a personal style and a tribal aesthetic. Four acts of bravery traditionally honored on the Plains included: touching an enemy in battle, capturing a weapon, leading a war party, and taking horses from an enemy camp. In addition to cultural meaning, many shirts were also thought to bestow spiritual power on their owners.<sup>7</sup>

Show students *Four Bears, Second Chief, in Full Dress*. Ask them to look for visual clues in the portrait that might indicate his tribal rank and acts of bravery. Students can search the website, <http://CatlinClassroom.si.edu>, for descriptions of Four Bears (M<h-to-t.h-pa).

Ask the students to select a person with power and authority or someone known for bravery. How would they depict this person to convey his/her importance? Have students list the clothing, objects, pose, and setting they would choose for the portrait and share their ideas with the class. Ask the students to design an autobiographical shirt that depicts their own hoped for future accomplishments.

### The Leader's Story

Many of the leaders depicted by George Catlin wore clothing that proclaimed their accomplishments. In *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*, Howard Gardner argues that one key to leadership is the creation of an arresting, inspirational story that embodies the leader's aspirations and actions. Ask students to identify the stories embodied by Native Americans such as Red Jacket and Osceola. Consider comparing and contrasting their stories and models of leadership. What was Catlin's story? Was Catlin a leader? Ask students to investigate the stories of ancient leaders such as Gilgamesh, historical figures such as Joan of Arc, and more contemporary leaders such as Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Are their actions consistent with their stories?

When cultures interact, their values and stories sometimes conflict. These conflicts are sometimes epitomized in the stories of conflict between leaders. Ask the students to research the stories of Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant. How did their personal stories embody their values and the perceptions of the sections they led? Ask students to follow up by researching Sitting Bull and George Armstrong Custer. Did they embody the stories and values of the cultures they represented?

Select contemporary leaders and ask the students to identify the stories they present to the public. Compare the actions of these leaders with their stories. Are they consistent?

### Blackhawk and Keokuk

The great warrior Black Hawk led the Sac and Fox in their heroic but doomed Black Hawk War of 1832, a last-ditch attempt to regain control of tribal farmland in Illinois. Keokuk was chief of the Sac and Fox, and his rivalry with his lead warrior Black Hawk illustrates the divisions that resulted within tribes as they sought to deal with the United States government. Unlike Black Hawk, who fought U.S. expansion, Keokuk thought warfare with the United States fruitless and signed over land in Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin. Their differences, played out over decades, highlight the era's disruption.

Divide the class into two groups, one to represent Black Hawk's position and one to represent Keokuk's position. Ask them to research primary sources at the Northern Illinois University Blackhawk War website (<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/blackhawk/index.html>) and compare their findings with the standard textbook. Create grade level appropriate assignments to present the designated positions. Younger students could enact a tribal meeting to discuss the alternatives

and vote on a course of action. Older students might be assigned to write a fictional diary or write newspaper articles.

Notes:

1. Catlin, G. *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians*. (London: 1841). Letter No. 1.
2. Catlin, G. *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians*. (London: 1841). Letter No. 31.
3. Catlin, G. *Last Rambles Amongst the Indians of the Rocky Mountains and the Andes*. (London: Gall and Inglis, 1868). pp. 354–355.
4. Densmore, C. *Red Jacket: Iroquois Diplomat and Orator*. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999).
5. Seton, E. *Life-histories of Northern Animals; An Account of the Mammals of Manitoba*. (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1909).
6. Weber, K. *Historic Bison Populations: A GIS-Based Estimate*. (Pocatello, Idaho: Intermountain GIS Users' Conference, 2001).
7. Horse Capture, J. and Horse Capture, G. *Beauty, Honor, and Tradition: The Legacy of Plains Indian Shirts*. (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

# LETTERS AND NOTES ON THE MANNERS, CUSTOMS, AND CONDITIONS OF NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS

by George Catlin

(First published in London in 1844)

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LETTER — No. 1

As the following pages have been hastily compiled, at the urgent request of a number of my friends, from a series of Letters and notes written by myself during several years' residence and travel amongst a number of the wildest and most remote tribes of the North American Indians, I have thought it best to make this page the beginning of my book; dispensing with preface, and even with dedication, other than that which I hereby make of it, with all my heart, to those who will take the pains to read it.

If it be necessary to render any apology for beginning thus unceremoniously my readers will understand that I had no space in these, my first volumes, to throw away; nor much time at my disposal, which I could, in justice, use for introducing myself and my works to the world.

Having commenced thus abruptly then, I will venture to take upon myself the sin of calling this one of the series of Letters of which I have spoken; although I am writing it several years later, and placing it at the beginning of my book; by which means I will be enabled briefly to introduce myself to my readers (who, as yet, know little or nothing of me), and also the subjects of the following epistles, with such explanations of the customs described in them, as will serve for a key or glossary to the same, and prepare the reader's mind for the information they contain.

Amidst the multiplicity of books which are, in this enlightened age, flooding the world, I feel it my duty, as early as possible, to beg pardon for making a book at all; and in the next (if my readers should become so much interested in my narrations, as to censure me for the brevity of the work) to take some considerable credit for not having trespassed too long upon their time and patience.

Leaving my readers, therefore, to find out what is in the book, without promising them anything, I proceed to say — of *myself*, that I was born in Wyöming, in North America, some thirty or forty years since, of parents who entered that beautiful and famed valley soon after the close of the revolutionary war, and the disastrous event of the "Indian massacre."

The early part of my life was whiled away, apparently, somewhat in vain, with books reluctantly held in one hand, and a rifle or fishing-pole firmly and affectionately grasped in the other.

At the urgent request of my father, who was a practicing lawyer, I was prevailed upon to abandon these favorite themes, and also my occasional dabbings with the brush, which had secured already a corner in my affections; and I commenced reading the law for a profession, under the direction of Reeve and Gould, of Connecticut. I attended the lectures of these learned judges for two years—was admitted to the bar—and practised the law, as a sort of *Nimrodical* lawyer, in my native land, for the term of two or three years; when I very deliberately sold my law library and all (save my rifle and fishing-tackle), and converting their proceeds into brushes and paint pots; I commenced the art of painting in Philadelphia, without teacher or adviser.

I there closely applied my hand to the labours of the art for several years; during which time my mind was continually reaching for some branch or enterprise of the art, on which to devote a whole life-time of enthusiasm; when a delegation of some ten or fifteen noble and dignified-looking Indians, from the wilds of the "Far West,"

suddenly arrived in the city, arrayed and equipped in all their classic beauty,—with shield and helmet,—with tunic and manteau,—tinted and tasselled off, exactly for the painter's palette!

In silent and stoic dignity, these lords of the forest strutted about the city for a few days, wrapped in their pictured robes, with their brows plumed with quills of the war-eagle, attracting the gaze and admiration of all who beheld them. After this, they took their leave for Washington City, and I was left to reflect and regret, which I did long and deeply, until I came to the following deductions and conclusions.

Black and blue cloth and civilization are destined, not only to veil, but to obliterate the grace and beauty of Nature. Man, in the simplicity and loftiness of his nature, unrestrained and unfettered by the disguises of art, is surely the most beautiful model for the painter,—and the country from which he hails is unquestionably the best study or school of the arts in the world: such I am sure, from the models I have seen, is the wilderness of North America. And the history and customs of such a people, preserved by pictorial illustrations, are themes worthy the life-time of one man, and nothing short of the loss of my life, shall prevent me from visiting their country, and of becoming their historian.

There was something inexpressibly delightful in the above resolve, which was to bring me amidst such living models for my brush; and at the same time, to place in my hands again, for my living and protection, the objects of my heart above-named; which had long been laid by to rust and decay in the city, without the remotest prospect of again contributing to my amusement.

I had fully resolved—I opened my views to my friends and relations, but got not one advocate or abettor. I tried fairly and faithfully, but it was in vain to reason with those whose anxieties were ready to fabricate every difficulty and danger that could be imagined, without being able to understand or appreciate the extent or importance of my designs, and I broke from them all,—from my wife and my aged parents,—myself my only adviser and protector.

With these views firmly fixed—armed, equipped, and supplied, I started out in the year 1832, and penetrated the vast and pathless wilds which are familiarly denominated the great "Far West" of the North American Continent, with a light heart, inspired with an enthusiastic hope and reliance that I could meet and overcome all the hazards and privations of a life devoted to the production of a literal and graphic delineation of the living manners, customs, and character of an interesting race of people, who are rapidly passing away from the face of the earth—lending a hand to a dying nation, who have no historians or biographers of their own to portray with fidelity their native looks and history; thus snatching from a hasty oblivion what could be saved for the benefit of posterity, and perpetuating it, as a fair and just monument, to the memory of a truly lofty and noble race.

I have spent about eight years already in the pursuit above-named, having been for the most of that time immersed in the Indian country, mingling with red men, and identifying myself with them as much as possible, in their games and amusements; in order the better to familiarize myself with their superstitions and mysteries, which are the keys to Indian life and character.

It was during the several years of my life just mentioned, and whilst I was in familiar participation with them in their sports and amusements, that I penned the following series of epistles; describing only such glowing or curious scenes and events as passed under my immediate observation; leaving their early history, and many of their traditions, language, &c. for a subsequent and much more elaborate work, for which I have procured the materials, and which I may eventually publish.

I set out on my arduous and perilous undertaking with the determination of reaching, ultimately, every tribe of Indians on the Continent of North America, and of bringing home faithful portraits of their principal personages, both men and women, from each tribe; views of their villages, games, &c. and full notes on their character and history. I designed, also, to procure their costumes, and a complete collection of their manufactures and weapons, and to perpetuate them in a *Gallery unique*, for the use and instruction of future ages.

I claim whatever merit there may have been in the originality of such a design, as I was undoubtedly the first artist who ever set out upon such a work, designing to carry his canvass to the Rocky Mountains; and a considerable part of the following Letters were written and published in the New York Papers, as early as the years 1832 and 1833; long before the Tours of Washington Irving, and several others, whose interesting narratives are before the world.

I have, as yet, by no means visited *all* the tribes; but I have progressed a very great way with the enterprise, and with far greater and more complete success than I expected.

I have visited forty-eight different tribes, the greater part of which I found speaking different languages, and containing in all 400,000 souls. I have brought home safe, and in good order, 310 portraits in oil, all painted in their native dress, and in their own wigwams; and also 200 other paintings in oil, containing views of their villages—their wigwams—their games—religious ceremonies—their dances—their ball plays—their buffalo hunting, and other amusements (containing in all, over 3000 full-length figures); and the landscapes of the country they live in, as well as a very extensive and curious collection of their costumes, and all their other manufactures, from the size of a wigwam down to the size of a quill or a rattle.

A considerable part of the above-named paintings, and Indian manufactures, will be found amongst the very numerous illustrations in the following pages; having been, in every instance, faithfully copied and reduced by my own hand, for the engraver, from my original paintings; and the reader of this book who will take the pains to step in to "CATLIN'S NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN GALLERY", Will find nearly every scene and custom which is described in this work, as well as many others, carefully and correctly delineated, and displayed upon the walls, and every weapon (and every "Sachem" and every "Sagamore" who has wielded them) according to the tenor of the tales herein recited.

So much of *myself* and of my *works*, which is all that I wish to say at present.

Of the Indians, I have much more to say, and to the following delineations of them, and their character and customs, I shall make no further apology for requesting the attention of my readers.

The Indians (as I shall call them), the savages or red men of the forests and prairies of North America, are at this time a subject of great interest and some importance to the civilized world; rendered more particularly so in this age, from their relative position to, and their rapid declension from, the civilized nations of the earth. A numerous nation of human beings, whose origin is beyond the reach of human investigation—whose early history is lost—whose term of national existence is nearly expired—three-fourths of whose country has fallen into the possession of civilized man within the short space of 250 years—twelve millions of whose bodies have fattened the soil in the mean time; who have fallen victims to whiskey, the small-pox and the bayonet; leaving at this time but a meagre proportion to live a shore time longer, in the certain apprehension of soon sharing a similar fate.

The writer who would undertake to embody the whole history of such a people, with all their misfortunes and calamities, must needs have much more space than I have allotted to this epitome; and he must needs begin also (as I am doing) with those who are *living*, or he would be very apt to dwell upon the preamble of his work, until the present living remnants of the race should have passed away; and their existence and customs, like those of ages gone by, become subjects of doubt and incredulity to the world for whom his book was preparing. Such an historian also, to do them justice, must needs correct many theories and opinions which have, either ignorantly or maliciously, gone forth to the world in indelible characters; and gather and arrange a vast deal which has been but imperfectly recorded, or placed to the credit of a people who have not had the means of recording it themselves; but have entrusted it, from necessity, to the honesty and punctuality of their enemies.

In such an history should be embodied, also, a correct account of their treatment, and the causes which have led to their rapid destruction; and a plain and systematical prophecy as to the time and manner of their final extinction, based upon the causes and the ratio of their former and present declension.

So Herculean a task may fall to my lot at a future period, or it may not: but I send forth these volumes at this time, fresh and full of their living deeds and customs, as a familiar and unstudied introduction (at least) to them and their native character; which I confidently hope will repay the readers who read for information and historical facts, as well as those who read but for amusement.

The world know generally, that the Indians of North America are copper coloured; that their eyes and their hair are black, &c.; that they are mostly uncivilized, and consequently unchristianized; that they are nevertheless human beings, with features, thoughts, reason, and sympathies like our own; but few yet know how they *live*, how they *dress*, how they *worship*, what are their actions, their customs: their religion, their amusements, &c. as they practise them in the uncivilized regions of their uninhabited country, which it is the main object of this work, clearly and distinctly to set forth.

It would be impossible at the same time, in a book of these dimensions, to explain *all* the manners and customs of these people; but as far as they are narrated, they have been described by my pen, upon the spot, as I have seen them transacted; and if some few of my narrations should seem a *little too highly coloured* I trust the world will be ready to extend to me that pardon which it is customary to yield to all artists whose main faults exist in the vividness of their colouring, rather than in the drawing of their pictures; but there is nothing else in them, I think, that I should ask pardon for, even though some of them should stagger credulity, and incur for me the censure of those critics, who sometimes, unthinkingly or unmercifully, sit at home at their desks, enjoying the luxury of wine and a good cigar, over the simple narration of the honest and weather-worn traveler (who shortens his half-starved life in catering for the world), to condemn him and his work to oblivion, and his wife and his little children to poverty and starvation; merely because he describes scenes which they have not beheld, and which, consequently, they are unable to believe.

The Indians of North America, as I have before said, are copper-coloured, with long black hair, black eyes, tall, straight, and elastic forms—are less than two millions in number—were originally the undisputed owners of the soil, and got their title to their lands from the Great Spirit who created them on it,—were once a happy and flourishing people, enjoying all the comforts and luxuries of life which they knew of, and consequently cared for:—were sixteen millions in numbers, and sent that number of daily prayers to the Almighty, and thanks for his goodness and protection. Their country was entered by white men, but a few hundred years since; and thirty millions of these are now scuffling for the goods and luxuries of life, over the bones and ashes of twelve millions of red men; six millions of whom have fallen victims to the small-pox, and the remainder to the sword, the bayonet, and whiskey; all of which means of their death and destruction have been introduced and visited upon them by acquisitive white men; and by white men, also, whose forefathers were welcomed and embraced in the land where the poor Indian met and fed them with "ears of green corn and with pemican." Of the two millions remaining alive at this time, about 1,400,000, are already the miserable living victims and dupes of white man's cupidity, degraded, discouraged and lost in the bewildering maze that is produced by little use of whiskey and its concomitant vices; and the remaining number are yet unroused and unenticed from their wild haunts or their primitive modes, by the dread or love of white man and his allurements.

It has been with these, mostly, that I have spent my time, and of these, chiefly, and their customs, that the following Letters treat. Their habits (and their's alone) as we can see them transacted, are native, and such as I have wished to fix and preserve for future ages.

Of the dead, and of those who are dying, of those who have suffered death, and of those who are now trodden and kicked through it, I may speak more fully in some deductions at the close of this book; or at some future time, when I may find more leisure, and may be able to speak of these scenes without giving offence to the world, or to any body in it.

Such a portrait then as I have set forth in the following pages (taken by myself from the free and vivid realities of life, instead of the vague and uncertain imagery of recollection, or from the haggard deformities and distortions of disease and death), I offer to the world for their amusement, as well as for their information; and I trust they will

pardon me, if it should be thought that I have over-estimated the Indian character, or at other times descended too much into the details and minutiae of Indian mysteries and absurdities.

The reader, then, to understand me rightly, and draw from these Letters the information which they are intended to give, must follow me a vast way from the civilized world; he must needs wend his way from the city of New York, over the Allegheny, and far beyond the mighty Missouri, and even to the base and summit of the Rocky Mountains, some two or three thousand miles from the Atlantic coast. He should forget many theories he has read in the books of Indian barbarities, of wanton butcheries and murders; and divest himself, as far as possible of the deadly prejudices which he has carried from his childhood, against this most unfortunate and most abused part of the race of his fellow-man.

He should consider, that if he has seen the savages of North America without making such a tour, he has fixed his eyes upon and drawn his conclusions (in all probability) only from those who inhabit the Frontier; whose habits have been changed—whose pride has been cut down—whose country has been ransacked—whose wives and daughters have been shamefully abused—whose lands have been wrested from them—whose limbs have become enervated and naked by the excessive use of whiskey—whose friends and relations have been prematurely thrown into their graves—whose native pride and dignity have at last given way to the unnatural vices which civilized cupidity has engrafted upon them, to be silently nurtured and magnified by a burning sense of injury and injustice, and ready for that cruel vengeance which often falls from the hand that is palsied by refined abuses, and yet unrestrained by the glorious influences of refined and moral cultivation. That if he has laid up what he considers well-founded knowledge of these people, from books which he has read, and from newspapers only, he should pause at least, and withhold his sentence before he passes it upon the character of a people, who are dying at the hands of their enemies, without the means of recording their own annals—struggling in their nakedness with their simple weapons, against guns and gunpowder—against whiskey and steel, and disease, and mailed warriors who are continually trampling them to the earth, and at last exultingly promulgating from the very soil which they have wrested from the poor savage, the history of his cruelties and barbarities, whilst his bones are quietly resting under the very furrows which their ploughs are turning.

So great and unfortunate are the disparities between savage and civil, in numbers—in weapons and defenses—in enterprise, in craft, and in education, that the former is almost universally the sufferer either in peace or in war; and not less so after his pipe and his tomahawk have retired to the grave with him, and his character is left to be entered upon the pages of history, and that justice done to his memory which from necessity, he has intrusted to his enemy.

Amongst the numerous historians, however, of these strange people, they have had some friends who have done them justice; yet as a part of all systems of Justice whenever it is meted to the poor Indian, it comes invariably too late, or is administered at an ineffectual distance; and that too when his enemies are continually about him, and effectually applying the means of his destruction.

Some writers, I have been grieved to see, have written down the character of the North American Indian, as dark, relentless, cruel and murderous in the last degree; with scarce a quality to stamp their existence of a higher order than that of the brutes:—whilst others have given them a high rank, as I feel myself authorized to do, as honorable and highly-intellectual beings; and others, both friends and foes to the red men, have spoken of them as an "anomaly in nature"!

In this place I have no time or inclination to reply to so unaccountable an assertion as this; contenting myself with the belief, that the term would be far more correctly applied to that part of the human family who have strayed farthest from nature, than it could be to those who are simply moving in, and filling the sphere for which they were designed by the Great Spirit who made them.

From what I have seen of these people I feel authorized to say, that there is nothing very strange or unaccountable in their character; but that it is a simple one, and easy to be learned and understood, if the right means be taken to familiarize ourselves with it. Although it has its dark spots, yet there is much in it to be applauded, and much to

recommend it to the admiration of the enlightened world. And I trust that the reader, who looks through these volumes with care, will be disposed to join me in the conclusion that the North American Indian in his native state, is an honest, hospitable, faithful, brave, warlike, cruel, revengeful, relentless,—yet honourable, contemplative and religious being.

If such be the case, I am sure there is enough in it to recommend it to the fair perusal of the world, and charity enough in all civilized countries, in this enlightened age to extend a helping hand to a dying race; provided that prejudice and fear can be removed, which have heretofore constantly held the civilized portions in dread of the savage—and away from that similar and friendly embrace, in which alone his true native character can be justly appreciated.

I am fully convinced, from a long familiarity with these people, that the Indian's misfortune has consisted chiefly in our ignorance of their true native character and disposition, which has always held us at a distrustful distance from them; inducing us to look upon them in no other light than that of a hostile foe, and worthy only of that system of continued warfare and abuse that has been for ever waged against them.

There is no difficulty in approaching the Indian and getting acquainted with him in his wild and unsophisticated state, and finding him an honest and honorable man; with feelings to meet feelings, if the above prejudice and dread can be laid aside, and any one will take the pains, as I have done, to go and see him in the simplicity of his native state, smoking his pipe under his own humble roof, with his wife and children around him, and his faithful dogs and horses hanging about his hospitable tenement.—So the world *may* see him and smoke his friendly pipe, which will be invariably extended to them; and share, with a hearty welcome, the best that his wigwam affords for the appetite, which is always set out to a stranger the next moment after he enters.

But so the mass of the world, most assuredly, will *not* see these people; for they are too far off, and approachable to those only whose avarice or cupidity alone lead them to those remote regions, and whose shame prevents them from publishing to the world the virtues which they have thrown down and trampled under foot.

The very use of the word *savage*, as it is applied in its general sense, I am inclined to believe is an abuse of the word, and the people to whom it is applied. The word, in its true definition, means no more than *wild*, or *wild man*; and a wild man may have been endowed by his Maker with all the humane and noble traits that inhabit the heart of a tame man. Our ignorance and dread or fear of these people, therefore, have given a new definition to the adjective; and nearly the whole civilized world apply the word *savage*, as expressive of the most ferocious, cruel, and murderous character that can be described.

The grizzly bear is called *savage*, because he is blood-thirsty, ravenous and cruel; and so is the tiger, and they, like the poor red man, have been feared and dreaded (from the distance at which ignorance and prejudice have kept us from them, or from resented abuses which we have practised when we have come in close contact with them), until Van Amburgh shewed the world, that even these ferocious and unreasoning animals wanted only the friendship and close embrace of their master, to respect and to love him.

As evidence of the hospitality of these ignorant and benighted people, and also of their honesty and honour, there will be found recorded many striking instances in the following pages. And also, as an offset to these, many evidences of the dark and cruel, as well as ignorant and disgusting excesses of passions, unrestrained by the salutary influences of laws and Christianity.

I have roamed about from time to time during seven or eight years, visiting and associating with, some three or four hundred thousand of these people, under an almost infinite variety of circumstances; and from the very many and decided voluntary acts of their hospitality and kindness, I feel bound to pronounce them, by nature, a kind and hospitable people. I have been welcomed generally in their country, and treated to the best that they could give me, without any charges made for my board; they have often escorted me through their enemies' country at some hazard to their own lives, and aided me in passing mountains and rivers with my awkward baggage; and under all of these

circumstances of exposure, no Indian ever betrayed me, struck me a blow, or stole from me a shilling's worth of my property that I am aware of.

This is saying a great deal, (and proving it too, if the reader will believe me) in favour of the virtues of these people; when it is borne in mind, as it should be, that there is no law in their land to punish a man for theft—that locks and keys are not known in their country—that the commandments have never been divulged amongst them; nor can any human retribution fail upon the head of a thief, save the disgrace which attaches as a stigma to his character, in the eyes of his people about him.

And thus in these little communities, strange as it may seem, in the absence of all systems of jurisprudence, I have often beheld peace and happiness, and quiet, reigning supreme, for which even kings and emperors might envy them. I have seen rights and virtue protected, and wrongs redressed; and I have seen conjugal, filial and paternal affection in the simplicity and contentedness of nature. I have unavoidably, formed warm and enduring attachments to some of these men which I do not wish to forget—who have brought me near to their hearts, and in our final separation have embraced me in their arms, and commended me and my affairs to the keeping of the Great Spirit.

For the above reasons, the reader will be disposed to forgive me for dwelling so long and so strong on the justness of the claims of these people; and for my occasional expressions of sadness, when my heart bleeds for the fate that awaits the remainder of their unlucky race; which is long to be outlived by the rocks, by the beasts, and even birds and reptiles of the country they live in;—set upon by their fellow-man, whose cupidity, it is feared, will fix no bounds to the Indian's earthly calamity, short of the grave.

I cannot help but repeat, before I close this Letter, that the tribes of the red men of North America, as a nation of human beings, are on their wane; that (to use their own very beautiful figure) "they are fast traveling to the shades of their fathers, towards the setting sun"; and that the traveller who would see these people in their native simplicity and beauty, must needs be hastily on his way to the prairies and Rocky Mountains, or he will see them only as they are now seen on the frontiers, as a basket of dead game,—harassed, chased, bleeding and dead; with their plumage and colours despoiled; to be gazed amongst in vain for some system or moral, or for some scale by which to estimate their true native character, other than that which has too often recorded them but a dark and unintelligible mass of cruelty and barbarity.

Without further comments I close this Letter, introducing my readers at once to the heart of the Indian country, only asking their forgiveness for having made it so long, and their patience whilst travelling through the following pages (as I journeyed through those remote realms) in search of information and rational amusement; in tracing out the true character of that "*strange anomaly*" of man in the simple elements of his nature, undissolved or compounded into the mysteries of enlightened and fashionable life.

## LETTERS AND NOTES ON THE MANNERS, CUSTOMS, AND CONDITIONS OF NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS

by George Catlin

(First published in London in 1844)

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LETTER — No. 31

In former Letters I have given some account of the *Bisons*, or (as they are more familiarly denominated in this country) *Buffaloes*, which inhabit these regions in numerous herds; and of which I must say yet a little more.

These noble animals of the ox species, and which have been so well described in our books on Natural History, are a subject of curious interest and great importance in this vast wilderness; rendered peculiarly so at this time, like the history of the poor savage; and from the same consideration, that they are rapidly wasting away at the approach of civilized man—and like him and his character, in a very few years, to live only in books or on canvass.

The word buffalo is undoubtedly most incorrectly applied to these animals, and I can scarcely tell why they have been so called; for they bear just about as much resemblance to the Eastern buffalo, as they do to a zebra or to a common ox. How nearly they may approach to the bison of Europe, which I never have had an opportunity to see, and which, I am inclined to think, is now nearly extinct, I am unable to say; yet if I were to judge from the numerous engravings I have seen of those animals, and descriptions I have read of them, I should be inclined to think, there was yet a wide difference between the bison of the American prairies, and those in the North of Europe and Asia. The American bison, or (as I shall here after call it) buffalo, is the largest of the ruminating animals that is now living in America; and seems to have been spread over the plains of this vast country, by the Great Spirit, for the use and subsistence of the red men, who live almost exclusively on their flesh, and clothe themselves with their skins. The reader, by referring back to in the beginning of this Work, will see faithful traces of the male and female of this huge animal, in their proud and free state of nature, grazing on the plains of the country to which they appropriately belong. Their colour is a dark brown, but changing very much as the season varies from warm to cold; their hair or fur, from its great length in the winter and spring, and exposure to the weather, turning quite light, and almost to a jet black, when the winter coat is shed off, and a new growth is shooting out.

The buffalo bull often grows to the enormous weight of 2000 pounds, and shakes a long and shaggy black mane, that falls in great profusion and *confusion*, over his head and shoulders; and oftentimes falling down quite to the ground. The horns are short, but very large, and have but one turn, *i.e.* they are a simple arch, without the least approach to a spiral form, like those of the common ox, or of the goat species.

The female is much smaller than the male, and always distinguishable by the peculiar shape of the horns, which are much smaller and more crooked, turning their points more in towards the centre of the forehead.

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the buffalo, is the peculiar formation and expression of the eye, the ball of which is very large and white, and the iris jet black. The lids of the eye seem always to be strained quite open, and the ball rolling forward and down; so that a considerable part of the iris is hidden behind the lower lid, while the pure white of the eyeball glares out over it in an arch, in the shape of a moon at the end of its first quarter.

These animals are, truly speaking, gregarious, but not migratory—they graze in immense and almost incredible numbers at times, and roam about and over vast tracts of country, from East to West, and from West to East, as often as from North to South; which has often been supposed they naturally and habitually did to accommodate themselves to the temperature of the climate in the different latitudes. The limits within which they are found in America, are from the 30th to the 55th degrees of North latitude; and their extent from East to West, which is from

the border of our extreme Western frontier limits, to the Western verge of the Rocky Mountains, is defined by quite different causes, than those which the degrees of temperature have prescribed to them on the North and the South. Within these 25 degrees of latitude, the buffaloes seem to flourish, and get their living without the necessity of evading the rigour of the climate, for which Nature seems most wisely to have prepared them by the greater or less profusion of fur, with which she has clothed them.

It is very evident that, as high North as Lake Winnipeg, seven or eight hundred miles North of this, the buffalo subsists itself through the severest winters; getting its food chiefly by browsing amongst the timber, and by pawing through the snow, for a bite at the grass, which in those regions is frozen up very suddenly in the beginning of the winter, with all its juices in it, and consequently furnishes very nutritious and efficient food; and often, if not generally, supporting the animal in better flesh during these difficult seasons of their lives, than they are found to be in, in the 30th degree of latitude, upon the borders of Mexico, where the severity of winter is not known, but during a long and tedious autumn, the herbage, under the influence of a burning sun, is gradually dried away to a mere husk, and its nutriment gone, leaving these poor creatures, even in the dead of winter, to bask in the warmth of a genial sun, without the benefit of a green or juicy thing to bite at.

The place from which I am now writing, may be said to be the very heart or nucleus of the buffalo country, about equi-distant between the two extremes; and of course, the most congenial temperature for them to flourish in. The finest animals that graze on the prairies are to be found in this latitude; and I am sure I never could send from a better source, some further account of the death and destruction that is dealt among these noble animals, and hurrying on their final extinction.

The Sioux are a bold and desperate set of horsemen, and great hunters; and in the heart of their country is one of the most extensive assortments of goods, of whiskey, and other saleable commodities, as well as a party of the most indefatigable men, who are constantly calling for every robe that can be stripped from these animals' backs.

These are the causes which lead so directly to their rapid destruction; and which open to the view of the traveller so freshly, so vividly, and so familiarly, the scenes of archery—of lancing, and of death-dealing, that belong peculiarly to this wild and shorn country.

The almost countless herds of these animals that are sometimes met with on these prairies, have been often spoken of by other writers, and may yet be seen by any traveller who will take the pains to visit these regions. The "*running season*," which is in August and September, is the time when they congregate into such masses in some places, as literally to blacken the prairies for miles together. It is no uncommon thing at this season, at these gatherings, to see several thousands in a mass, eddying and wheeling about under a cloud of dust, which is raised by the bulls as they are pawing in the dirt, or engaged in desperate combats, as they constantly are, plunging and butting at each other in the most furious manner. In these scenes, the males are continually following the females, and the whole mass are in constant motion; and all bellowing (or "roaring") in deep and hollow sounds; which, mingled altogether, appear, at the distance of a mile or two, like the sound of distant thunder.

During the season whilst they are congregated together in these dense and confused masses, the remainder of the country around for many miles, becomes entirely vacated; and the traveller may spend many a toilsome day, and many a hungry night, without being cheered by the sight of one; where, if he retraces his steps a few weeks after, he will find them dispersed, and grazing quietly in little families and flocks, and equally stocking the whole country. Of these quiet little herds, a fair representation will be seen, where some are grazing, others at play, or lying down, and others indulging in their "wallows". "A bull in his wallow" is a frequent saying in this country; and has a very significant meaning with those who have ever seen a buffalo bull performing *ablution*, or rather endeavouring to cool his heated sides, by tumbling about in a mud puddle.

In the heat of summer, these huge animals, which, no doubt, suffer very much with the great profusion of their long and shaggy hair or fur, often graze on the low grounds in the prairies, where there is little stagnant water lying amongst the grass, and the ground underneath being saturated with it, is soft, into which the enormous bull, lowered

down upon one knee, will plunge his horns, and at last his head, driving up the earth, and soon making an excavation in the ground, into which the water filters from amongst the grass, forming for him in a few moments, a cool and comfortable bath, into which he plunges like a hog in his mire.

In this *delectable* laver, he throws himself flat upon his side, and forcing himself violently around, with his horns and his huge hump on his shoulders presented to the sides, he ploughs up the ground by his rotary motion, sinking himself deeper and deeper in the ground, continually enlarging his pool, in which he at length becomes nearly immersed; and the water and mud about him mixed into a complete mortar, which changes his colour, and drips in streams from every part of him as he rises up upon his feet, a hideous monster of mud and ugliness, too frightful and too eccentric to be described!

It is generally the leader of the herd that takes upon him to make this excavation; and if not (but another one opens the ground), the leader (who is conqueror) marches forward, and driving the other from it plunges himself into it; and having cooled his sides, and changed his colour to a walking mass of mud and mortar; he stands in the pool until inclination induces him to step out, and give place to the next in command, who stands ready; and another, and another, who advance forward in their turns, to enjoy the luxury of the wallow; until the whole band (sometimes an hundred or more) will pass through it in turn; each one throwing his body around in a similar manner; and each one adding a little to the dimensions of the pool, while he carries away in his hair an equal share of the clay, which dries to a grey or whitish colour, and gradually falls off. By this operation, which is done, perhaps, in the space of half an hour, a circular excavation of fifteen or twenty feet in diameter, and two feet in depth, is completed, and left for the water to run into, which soon fills it to the level of the ground.

To these sinks, the waters lying on the surface of the prairies, are continually draining, and in them lodging their vegetable deposits; which, after a lapse of years, fill them up to the surface with a rich soil, which throws up an unusual growth of grass and herbage; forming conspicuous circles which arrest the eye of the traveller, and are calculated to excite his surprise for ages to come.

Many travellers who have penetrated not quite far enough into the Western country to see the habits of these animals, and the manner in which these *mysterious* circles are made; but who have seen the prairies strewed with their bleached bones, and have beheld these strange circles, which often occur in groups, and of different sizes—have come home with beautiful and ingenious theories (which *must needs be made*), for the origin of these singular and unaccountable appearances, which, for want of a rational theory, have generally been attributed to *fairy feet*, and gained the appellation of "*fairy circles*."

Many travellers, again, have supposed that these rings were produced by the dances of the Indians, which are oftentimes (and in fact most generally) performed in a circle; yet a moment's consideration disproves such a probability, inasmuch as the Indians always select the ground for their dancing near the sites of their villages, and that always on a dry and hard foundation; when these "fairy circles" are uniformly found to be on low and wet ground.

As my visit to these parts of the "*Great Far West*" has brought me into the heart of the buffalo country, where I have had abundant opportunities of seeing this noble animal in all its phases—its habits of life, and every mode of its death; I shall take the liberty of being yet a little more particular, and of rendering some further accounts of scenes which I have witnessed in following out my sporting propensities in these singular regions.

The chief hunting amusement of the Indians in these parts consists in the chase of the buffalo, which is almost invariably done on horseback, with bow and lance. In this exercise, which is highly prized by them, as one of their most valued amusements, as well as for the principal mode of procuring meat for their subsistence, they become exceedingly expert; and are able to slay these huge animals with apparent ease.

The Indians in these parts are all mounted on small, but serviceable horses, which are caught by them on the prairies, where they are often running wild in numerous bands. The Indian, then, mounted on his little wild horse, which has been through some years of training, dashes off at full speed amongst the herds of buffaloes, elks, or even antelopes,

and deals his deadly arrows to their hearts from his horse's back. The horse is the fleetest animal of the prairie, and easily brings his rider alongside of his game, which falls a certain prey to his deadly shafts, at the distance of a few paces.

In the chase of the buffalo, or other animal, the Indian generally "strips" himself and his horse, by throwing off his shield and quiver, and every part of his dress, which might be an encumbrance to him in running; grasping his bow in his left hand, with five or six arrows drawn from his quiver, and ready for instant use. In his right hand (or attached to the wrist) is a heavy whip, which he uses without mercy, and forces his horse alongside of his game at the swiftest speed.

These horses are so trained, that the Indian has little use for the rein, which hangs on the neck, whilst the horse approaches the animal on the right side, giving his rider the chance to throw his arrow to the left; which he does at the instant when the horse is passing—bringing him opposite to the heart, which receives the deadly weapon "to the feather." When pursuing a large herd, the Indian generally rides close in the rear, until he selects the animal he wishes to kill, which he separates from the throng as soon as he can, by dashing his horse between it and the herd, and forcing it off by itself; where he can approach it without the danger of being trampled to death, to which he is often liable by too closely escorting the multitude.

In another drawing, I have fairly represented the mode of *approaching*, at the instant the arrow is to be thrown; and the striking disparity between the size of a huge bull of 2000 pounds weight, and the Indian horse, which, it will be borne in mind, is but a pony.

No bridle whatever is used in this country by the Indians, as they have no knowledge of a bit. A short halter, however, which answers in place of a bridle, is in general use; of which they usually form a noose around the under jaw of the horse, by which they get great power over the animal; and which they use generally to stop rather than guide the horse. This halter is called by the French Traders in the country, *l'arrêt*, the stop, and has great power in arresting the speed of a horse; though it is extremely dangerous to use too freely as a guide, interfering too much with the freedom of his limbs, for the certainty of his feet and security of his rider.

When the Indian then has directed the course of his steed to the animal which he has selected, the training of the horse is such, that it knows the object of its rider's selection, and exerts every muscle to give it close company; while the halter lies loose and untouched upon its neck, and the rider leans quite forward, and off from the side of his horse, with his bow drawn, and ready for the deadly shot, which is given at the instant he is opposite to the animal's body. The horse being instinctively afraid of the animal (though he generally brings his rider within the reach of the end of his bow), keeps his eye strained upon the furious enemy he is so closely encountering; and the moment he has approached to the nearest distance required, and has passed the animal, whether the shot is given or not, he gradually sheers off, to prevent coming on to the horns of the infuriated beast, which often are instantly turned, and presented for the fatal reception of its too familiar attendant. These frightful collisions often take place, notwithstanding the sagacity of the horse, and the caution of its rider; for in these extraordinary (and inexpressible) exhilarations of chase, which seem to drown the prudence alike, of instinct and reason, both horse and rider often seem rushing on to destruction, as if it were mere pastime and amusement. (1)

I have always counted myself a prudent man, yet I have often *waked* (as it were) out of the delirium of the chase (into which I had fallen, as into an agitated sleep, and through which I had passed as through a delightful dream), where to have died would have been but to have remained, riding on, without a struggle or a pang.

In some of these, too, I have arisen from the prairie, covered with dirt and blood, having severed company with gun and horse, the one lying some twenty or thirty feet from me with a broken stalk, and the other coolly browsing on the grass at half a mile distance, without man, and without other beast remaining in sight.

For the novice in these scenes there is much danger of his limbs and his life, and he finds it a hard and a desperate struggle that brings him in at *the death* of these huge monsters, except where it has been produced by hands that have acquired more sleight and tact than his own.

With the Indian, who has made this the every day sport and amusement of his life, there is less difficulty and less danger; he rides without "losing his breath," and his unagitated hand deals *certainty* in its deadly blows.

In another painting, I have represented a party of Indians in chase of a herd, some of whom are pursuing with lance and others with bows and arrows. The group in the foreground shews the attitude at the instant after the arrow has been thrown and driven to the heart; the Indian at full speed, and the *lasso* dragging behind his horse's heels. The lasso is a long thong of rawhide, of ten or fifteen yards in length, made of several braids or twists, and used chiefly to catch the wild horse, which is done by throwing over their necks a noose which is made at the end of the *lasso*, with which they are "choked down." In running the buffaloes, or in time of war, the *lasso* drags on the ground at the horse's feet, and sometimes several rods behind, so that if a man is dismounted, which is often the case, by the tripping or stumbling of the horse, he has the power of grasping to the lasso, and by stubbornly holding on to it, of stopping and securing his horse, on whose back he is instantly replaced, and continuing on in the chase.

In the dead of the winters, which are very long and severely cold in this country, where horses cannot be brought into the chase with any avail, the Indian runs upon the surface of the snow by the aid of his snow shoes, which buoy him up, while the great weight of the buffaloes, sinks them down to the middle of their sides, and completely stopping their progress, ensures them certain and easy victims to the bow or lance of their pursuers. The snow in these regions often lies during the winter, to the depth of three and four feet, being blown away from the tops and sides of the hills in many places, which are left bare for the buffaloes to graze upon, whilst it is drifted in the hollows and ravines to a very great depth, and rendered almost entirely impassable to these huge animals, which, when closely pursued by their enemies, endeavour to plunge through it, but are soon wedged in and almost unable to move, where they fall an easy prey to the Indian, who runs up lightly upon his snow shoes and drives his lance to their hearts. The skins are then stripped off, to be sold to the Fur Traders, and the carcasses left to be devoured by the wolves. This is the season in which the greatest number of these animals are destroyed for their robes—they are most easily killed at this time, and their hair or fur being longer and more abundant, gives greater value to the robe.

The Indians generally kill and dry meat enough in the fall, when it is fat and juicy, to last them through the winter; so that they have little other object for this unlimited slaughter, amid the drifts of snow, than that of procuring their robes for traffic with their Traders. The snow shoes are made in a great many forms, of two and three feet in length, and one foot or more in width, of a hoop or hoops bent around for the frame, with a netting or web woven across with strings of rawhide, on which the feet rest, and to which they are fastened with straps somewhat like a skate. (2) With these the Indian will glide over the snow with astonishing quickness, without sinking down, or scarcely leaving his track where he has gone.

The poor buffaloes have their enemy *man*, besetting and besieging them at all times of the year, and in all the modes that man in his superior wisdom has been able to devise for their destruction. They struggle in vain to evade his deadly shafts, when he dashes amongst them over the plains on his wild horse—they plunge into the snow-drifts where they yield themselves an easy prey to their destroyers, and they also stand unwittingly and behold him, unsuspected under the skin of a white wolf, insinuating himself and his fatal weapons into close company, when they are peaceably grazing on the level prairies, and shot down before they are aware of their danger.

There are several varieties of the wolf species in this country, the most formidable and most numerous of which are white, often sneaking about in gangs or families of fifty or sixty in numbers, appearing in distance, on the green prairies like nothing but a dock of sheep. Many of these animals grow to a very great size, being I should think, quite a match for the largest Newfoundland dog. At present, whilst the buffaloes are so abundant, and these ferocious animals are glutted with the buffalo's flesh, they are harmless, and everywhere sneak away from man's presence; which I scarcely think will be the case after the buffaloes are all gone, and they are left, as they must be, with scarcely anything to eat. They always are seen following about in the vicinity of herds of buffaloes and stand ready

to pick the bones of those that the hunters leave on the ground, or to overtake and devour those that are wounded, which fall an easy prey to them. While the herd of buffaloes are together, they seem to have little dread of the wolf, and allow them to come in close company with them. The Indian then has taken advantage of this fact, and often places himself under the skin of this animal, and crawls for half a mile or more on his hands and knees, until he approaches within a few rods of the unsuspecting group, and easily shoots down the fattest of the throng.

The buffalo is a very timid animal, and shuns the vicinity of man with the keenest sagacity; yet, when overtaken, and harassed or wounded, turns upon its assailants with the utmost fury, who have only to seek safety in flight. In their desperate resistance the finest horses are often destroyed; but the Indian, with his superior sagacity and dexterity, generally finds some effective mode of escape.

During the season of the year whilst the calves are young, the male seems to stroll about by the side of the dam, as if for the purpose of protecting the young, at which time it is exceedingly hazardous to attack them, as they are sure to turn upon their pursuers, who have often to fly to each others assistance. The buffalo calf, during the first six months is red, and has so much the appearance of a red calf in cultivated fields, that it could easily be mingled and mistaken amongst them. In the fall, when it changes its hair it takes a brown coat for the winter, which it always retains. In pursuing a large herd of buffaloes at the season when their calves are but a few weeks old, I have often been exceedingly amused with the curious manoeuvres of these shy little things. Amidst the thundering confusion of a throng of several hundreds or several thousands of these animals, there will be many of the calves that lose sight of their dams; and being left behind by the throng, and the swift passing hunters, they endeavour to secrete themselves, when they are exceedingly put to it on a level prairie, where nought can be seen but the short grass of six or eight inches in height, save an occasional bunch of wild sage, a few inches higher, to which the poor affrighted things will run, and dropping on their knees, will push their noses under it, and into the grass, where they will stand for hours, with their eyes shut, imagining themselves securely hid, whilst they are standing up quite straight upon their hind feet and can easily be seen at several miles distance. It is a familiar amusement for us accustomed to these scenes, to retreat back over the ground where we have just escorted the herd, and approach these little trembling things, which stubbornly maintain their positions, with their noses pushed under the grass, and their eyes strained upon us, as we dismount from our horses and are passing around them. From this fixed position they are sure not to move, until hands are laid upon them, and then for the shins of a novice, we can extend our sympathy ; or if he can preserve the skin on his bones from the furious buttings of its head, we know how to congratulate him on his signal success and good luck. In these desperate struggles, for a moment, the little thing is conquered, and makes no further resistance. And I have often, in concurrence with a known custom of the country, held my hands over the eyes of the calf, and breathed a few strong breaths into its nostrils; after which I have, with my hunting companions, rode several miles into our encampment, with the little prisoner busily following the heels of my horse the whole way, as closely and as affectionately as its instinct would attach it to the company of its dam!

This is one of the most extraordinary things that I have met with in the habits of this wild country, and although I had often heard of it, and felt unable exactly to believe it, I am now willing to bear testimony to the fact, from the numerous instances which I have witnessed since I came into the country. During the time that I resided at this post, in the spring of the year, on my way up the river, I assisted (in numerous hunts of the buffalo, with the Fur Company's men), in bringing in, in the above manner, several of these little prisoners, which sometimes followed for five or six miles close to our horses' heels, and even into the Fur Company's Fort, and into the stable where our horses were led. In this way, before I left for the headwaters of the Missouri, I think we had collected about a dozen, which Mr. Laidlaw was successfully raising with the aid of a good milch cow, and which were to be committed to the care of Mr. Chouteau to be transported by the return of the steamer, to his extensive plantation in the vicinity of St. Louis. (3)

It is truly a melancholy contemplation for the traveller in this country, to anticipate the period which is not far distant, when the last of these noble animals, at the hands of white and red men, will fall victims to their cruel and improvident rapacity; leaving these beautiful green fields, a vast and idle waste, unstocked and unpeopled for ages to come, until the bones of the one and the traditions of the other will have vanished, and left scarce an intelligible trace behind.

That the reader should not think me visionary in these contemplations, or romancing in making such assertions, I will hand him the following item of the extravagancies which are practiced in these regions, and rapidly leading to the results which I have just named.

When I first arrived at this place, on my way up the river, which was in the month of May, in 1832, and had taken up my lodgings in the Fur Company's Fort, Mr. Laidlaw, of whom I have before spoken, and also his chief clerk, Mr. Halsey, and many of their men, as well as the chiefs of the Sioux, told me, that only a few days before I arrived, (when an immense herd of buffaloes had showed themselves on the opposite side of the river, almost blackening the plains for a great distance,) a party of five or six hundred Sioux Indians on horseback, forded the river about mid-day, and spending a few hours amongst them, recrossed the river at sun-down and came into the Fort with *fourteen hundred fresh buffalo tongues*, which were thrown down in a mass, and for which they required but a few gallons of whiskey, which was soon demolished, indulging them in a little, and harmless carouse.

This profligate waste of the lives of these noble and useful animals, when, from all that I could learn not a skin or a pound of the meat (except the tongues), was brought in, fully supports me in the seemingly extravagant predictions that I have made as to their extinction, which I am certain is near at hand. In the above extravagant instance, at a season when their skins were without fur and not worth taking off, and their camp was so well stocked with fresh and dried meat, that they had no occasion for using the flesh, there is a fair exhibition of the improvident character of the savage, and also of his recklessness in catering for his appetite, so long as the present inducements are held out to him in his country, for its gratification.

In this singular country, where the poor Indians have no laws or regulations of society, making it a vice or an impropriety to drink to excess, they think it no harm to indulge in the delicious beverage, as long as they are able to buy whiskey to drink. They look to white men as wiser than themselves, and able to set them examples—they see none of these in their country but sellers of whiskey, who are constantly tendering it to them, and most of them setting the example by using it themselves; and they easily acquire a taste, that to be catered for, where whiskey is sold at sixteen dollars per gallon, soon impoverishes them, and must soon strip the skin from the last buffalo's back that lives in their country, to "be dressed by their squaws" and vended to the Traders for a pint of diluted alcohol.

From the above remarks it will be seen, that not only the red men, but red men and white, have aimed destruction at the race of these animals; and with them, *beasts* have turned hunters of buffaloes in this country, slaying them, however, in less numbers, and for far more laudable purpose than that of selling their skins. The white wolves, of which I have spoken in a former epistle, follow the herds of buffaloes as I have said, from one season to another, glutting themselves on the carcasses of those that fall by the deadly shafts of their enemies, or linger with disease or old age to be dispatched by these sneaking cormorants, who are ready at all times kindly to relieve them from the pangs of a lingering death.

Whilst the herd is together, the wolves never attack them, as they instantly gather for combined resistance, which they effectually make. But when the herds are travelling; it often happens that an aged or wounded one, lingers at a distance behind, and when fairly out of sight of the herd, is set upon by these voracious hunters, which often gather to the number of fifty or more, and are sure at last to torture him to death, and use him up at a meal. The buffalo, however, is a huge and furious animal, and when his retreat is cut off, makes desperate and deadly resistance, contending to the last moment for the right of life—and oftentimes deals death by wholesale, to his canine assailants, which he is tossing into the air or stamping to death under his feet.

During my travels in these regions, I have several times come across such a gang of these animals surrounding an old or a wounded bull, where it would seem, from appearances, that they had been for several days in attendance, and at intervals desperately engaged in the effort to take his life. But a short time since, as one of my hunting companions and myself were returning to our encampment with our horses loaded with meat, we discovered at a distance, a huge bull, encircled with a gang of white wolves; we rode up as near as we could without driving them away, and being within pistol shot, we had a remarkably good view, where I sat for a few moments and made a

sketch in my note-book; after which, we rode up and gave the signal for them to disperse, which they instantly did, withdrawing themselves to the distance of fifty or sixty rods, when we found, to our great surprise, that the animal had made desperate resistance, until his eyes were entirely eaten out of his head—the grizzle of his nose was mostly gone—his tongue was half eaten off, and the skin and flesh of his legs torn almost literally into strings. In this tattered and torn condition, the poor old veteran stood bracing up in the midst of his devourers, who had ceased hostilities for a few minutes, to enjoy a sort of parley, recovering strength and preparing to resume the attack in a few moments again. In this group, some were reclining, to gain breath, whilst others were sneaking about and licking their chops in anxiety for a renewal of the attack; and others, less lucky, had been crushed to death by the feet or the horns of the bull. I rode nearer to the pitiable object as he stood bleeding and trembling before me, and said to him, "Now is your time, old fellow, and you had better be off." Though blind and nearly destroyed, there seemed evidently to be a recognition of a friend in me, as he straightened up, and, trembling with excitement, dashed off at full speed upon the prairie, in a straight line. We turned our horses and resumed our march, and when we had advanced a mile or more, we looked back, and on our left, where we saw again the ill-fated animal surrounded by his tormentors, to whose insatiable voracity he unquestionably soon fell a victim.

Thus much I wrote of the buffaloes, and of the accidents that befall them, as well as of the fate that awaits them; and before I closed my book, I strolled out one day to the shade of a plum-tree, where I laid in the grass on a favourite bluff, and wrote thus: —

"It is generally supposed, and familiarly said, that a man '*falls*' into a rêverie; but I seated myself in the shade a few minutes since, resolved to *force* myself into one; and for this purpose I laid open a small pocket-map of North America, and excluding my thoughts from every other object in the world, I soon succeeded in producing the desired illusion. This little chart, over which I bent, was seen in all its parts, as nothing but the green and vivid reality. I was lifted up upon an imaginary pair of wings, which easily raised and held me floating in the open air, from whence I could behold beneath me the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans—the great cities of the East, and the mighty rivers. I could see the blue chain of the great lakes at the North—the Rocky Mountains, and beneath them and near their base, the vast, and almost boundless plains of grass, which were speckled with the bands of grazing buffaloes!

"The world turned gently around, and I examined its surface; continent after continent passed under my eye, and yet amidst them all, I saw not the vast and vivid green, that is spread like a carpet over the Western wilds all my own country. I saw not elsewhere in the world, the myriad herds of buffaloes—my eyes scanned in vain, for they were not. And when I turned again to the wilds of my native land, I beheld them all in motion! For the distance of several hundreds of miles from North to South, they were wheeling about in vast columns and herds—some were scattered, and ran with furious wildness—some lay dead, and others were pawing the earth for a hiding-place—some were sinking down and dying, gushing out their life's blood in deep-drawn sighs—and others were contending in furious battle for the life they possessed, and the ground that they stood upon. They had long since assembled from the thickets, and secret haunts of the deep forest, into the midst of the treeless and bushless plains, as the place for their safety. I could see in an hundred places, amid the wheeling bands, and on their skirts and flanks, the leaping wild horse darting among them. I saw not the arrows, nor heard the twang of the sinewy bows that sent them; but I saw their victims fall!—on other steeds that rushed along their sides, I saw the glistening lances, which seemed to lay across them; their blades were blazing in the sun, till dipped in blood, and then I lost them! In other parts (and there were many), the vivid dash of *fire-arms* was seen—their victims fell too, and over their dead bodies hung suspended in air, little clouds of whitened smoke, from under which the flying horsemen had darted forward to mingle again with, and deal death to, the trampling throng.

"So strange were men mixed (both red and white) with the countless herds that wheeled and eddyed about, that all below seemed one vast extended field of battle—whole armies, in some places, seemed to blacken the earth's surface;—in other parts, regiments, battalions, wings, platoons, rank and file, and "*Indian-file*"—all were in motion; and death and destruction seemed to be the watch-word amongst them. In their turmoil, they sent up great clouds of dust, and with them came the mingled din of groans and trampling hoofs, that seemed like the rumbling of a dreadful cataract, or the roaring of distant thunder. Alternate pity and admiration harrowed up in my bosom and my

brain, many a hidden thought; and amongst them a few of the beautiful notes that were once sung, and exactly in point: '*Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.*' Even such was the din amidst the quadrupeds of these vast plains. And from the craggy cliffs of the Rocky Mountains also were seen descending into the valley, the myriad Tartars, who had not horses to ride, but before their well-drawn bows the fattest of the herds were falling. Hundreds and thousands were strewed upon the plains—they were flayed, and their reddened carcasses left; and about them bands of wolves, and dogs, and buzzards were seen devouring them. Contiguous, and in sight, were the distant and feeble smokes of wigwams and villages, where the skins were dragged, and dressed for white man's luxury! where they were all sold for *whiskey*, and the poor Indians laid drunk, and were crying. I cast my eyes into the towns and cities of the East, and there I beheld buffalo robes hanging at almost every door for traffic; and I saw also the curling smokes of a thousand *Stills*—and I said, 'Oh insatiable man, is thy avarice such! wouldst thou tear the skin from the back of the last animal of this noble race, *and rob thy fellow-man of his meat, and for it give him poison.*' "

Many are the rudenesses and wilds in Nature's works, which are destined to fall before the deadly axe and desolating hands of cultivating man; and so amongst her ranks of *living*, of beast and human, we often find noble stamps, or beautiful colours, to which our admiration clings; and even in the overwhelming march of civilized improvements arid refinements do we love to cherish their existence, and lend our efforts to preserve them in their primitive rudeness. Such of Nature's works are always worthy of our preservation and protection; and the further we become separated (and the face of the country) from that pristine wildness and beauty, the more pleasure does the mind of enlightened man feel in recurring to those scenes, when he can have them preserved for his eyes and his mind to dwell upon.

Of such "rudenesses and wilds", Nature has no where presented more beautiful and lovely scenes, than those of the vast prairies of the West; and of *man* and *beast*, no nobler specimens than those who inhabit them—the *Indian* and the *buffalo*—joint and original tenants of the soil, and fugitives together from the approach of civilized man; they have fled to the great plains of the West, and there, under an equal doom, they have taken up their *last abode*, where their race will expire, and their bones will bleach together.

It may be that *power* is *right*, and *voracity* a *virtue*; and that these people, and these noble animals, are *righteously* doomed to an issue that *will* not be averted. It can be easily proved—we have a civilized science that can easily do it, or anything else that may be required to cover the iniquities of civilized man in catering for his unholy appetites. It can be proved that the weak and ignorant have no *rights*—that there can be no virtue in darkness—that God's gifts have no meaning or merit until they are appropriated by civilized man—by him brought into the light, and converted to his use and luxury. We have a mode of reasoning (I forget what it is called) by which all this can be proved, and even more. The *word* and the *system* are entirely of *civilized* origin; and latitude is admirably given to them in proportion to the increase of civilized wants, which often require a *judge* to overrule the laws of nature. I say that *we* can prove such things; but an *Indian* cannot. It is a mode of reasoning unknown to him in his nature's simplicity but admirably adapted to subserve the interests of the enlightened world; who are always their own judges, when dealing with the savage: and who, in the present refined age, have many appetites that can only be lawfully indulged, by proving God's laws defective.

It is not enough in this polished and extravagant age, that we get from the Indian his lands, and the very clothes from his back, but the food from their mouths must be stopped, to add a new and useless article to the fashionable world's luxuries. The ranks must be thinned, and the race exterminated, of this noble animal, and the Indians of the great plains left without the means of supporting life, that white men may figure a few years longer, enveloped in buffalo robes—that they may spread them, for their pleasure and elegance, over the backs of their sleighs, and trail them ostentatiously amidst the busy throng, as things of beauty and elegance that had been made for them!

Reader! listen to the following calculations, and forget them not. The buffaloes (the quadrupeds from whose backs your beautiful robes were taken, and whose myriads were once spread over the whole country, from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean) have recently fled before the appalling appearance of civilized man, and taken up their abode and pasturage amid the almost boundless prairies of the West. An instinctive dread of their deadly foes, who made an easy prey of them whilst grazing in the forest, has led them to seek the midst of the vast and treeless

plains of grass, as the spot where they would be least exposed to the assaults of their enemies; and it is exclusively in those desolate fields of silence (yet of beauty) that they are to be found—and over these vast steppes, or prairies, have they fled, like the Indian, towards the "setting sun"; until their bands have been crowded together, and their limits confined to a narrow strip of country on this side of the Rocky Mountains.

This strip of country, which extends from the province of Mexico to lake Winnepeg on the North, is almost one entire plain of grass, which is, and ever must be, useless to cultivating man. It is here, and here chiefly, that the buffaloes dwell; and with, and hovering about them, live and flourish the tribes of Indians, whom God made for the enjoyment of that fair land and its luxuries.

It is a melancholy contemplation for one who has travelled as I have, through these realms, and seen this noble animal in all its pride and glory, to contemplate it so rapidly wasting from the world, drawing the irresistible conclusion too, which one must do, that its species is soon to be extinguished, and with it the peace and happiness (if not the actual existence) of the tribes of Indians who are joint tenants with them, in the occupancy of these vast and idle plains.

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

I would ask no other monument to my memory, nor any other enrolment of my name amongst the famous dead, than the reputation of having been the founder of such an institution.

Such scenes might easily have been preserved, and still could be cherished on the great plains of the West, without detriment to the country or its borders; for the tracts of country on which the buffaloes have assembled, are uniformly sterile, and of no available use to cultivating man.

It is on these plains, which are stocked with buffaloes, that the finest specimens of the Indian race are to be seen. It is here, that the savage is decorated in the richest costume. It is here, and here only, that his wants are all satisfied, and even the *luxuries* of life are afforded him in abundance. And here also is he the proud and honourable man (before he has had teachers or laws), above the imported wants, which beget meanness and vice; stimulated by ideas of honour and virtue, in which the God of Nature has certainly not curtailed him.

There are, by a fair calculation, more than 300,000 Indians, who are now subsisted on the flesh of the buffaloes, and by those animals supplied with all the luxuries of life which they desire, as they know of none others. The great variety of uses to which they convert the body and other parts of that animal, are almost incredible to the person who has not actually dwelt amongst these people, and closely studied their modes and customs. Every part of their flesh is converted into food, in one shape or another, and on it they entirely subsist. The robes of the animals are worn by the Indians instead of blankets—their skins when tanned, are used as coverings for their lodges, and for their beds; undressed, they are used for constructing canoes—for saddles, for bridles—l'arrêts, lasos, and thongs. The horns are shaped into ladles and spoons—the brains are used for dressing the skins—their bones are used for saddle trees—for war clubs, and scrapers for graining the robes—and others are broken up for the marrow-fat which is contained in them. Their sinews are used for strings and backs to their bows—for thread to string their beads and sew their dresses. The feet of the animals are boiled, with their hoofs, for the glue they contain, for fastening their arrow points, and many other uses. The hair from the head and shoulders, which is long, is twisted and braided into halters, and the tail is used for a fly brush. In this wise do these people convert and use the various parts of this useful animal, and with all these luxuries of life about them, and their numerous games, they are happy (God bless them) in the ignorance of the disastrous fate that awaits them.

Yet this interesting community, with its sports, its wildnesses, its languages, and all its manners and customs, could be perpetuated, and also the buffaloes, whose numbers would increase and supply them with food for ages and centuries to come, if a system of non-intercourse could be established and preserved. But such is not to be the case—the buffalo's doom is sealed, and with their extinction must assuredly sink into real despair and starvation, the inhabitants of these vast plains, which afford for the Indians, no other possible means of subsistence; and they must at last fall a prey to wolves and buzzards, who will have no other bones to pick.

It seems hard and cruel, (does it not?) that we civilized people with all the luxuries and comforts of the world about us, should be drawing from the backs of these useful animals the skins for our luxury, leaving their carcasses to be devoured by the wolves—that we should draw from that country, some 150 or 200,000 of their robes annually the greater part of which are taken from animals that are killed expressly for the robe, at a season when the meat is not cured and preserved, and for each of which skins the Indian has received but a pint of whiskey!

Such is the fact, and that number or near it, are annually destroyed, in addition to the number that is necessarily killed for the subsistence of 300,000 Indians, who live entirely upon them. It may be said, perhaps, that the Fur Trade of these great western realms, which is now limited chiefly to the purchase of buffalo robes, is of great and national importance, and should and must be encouraged. To such a suggestion I would reply, by merely enquiring, (independently of the poor Indians' disasters,) how much more advantageously would such a capital be employed, both for the weal of the country and for the owners, if it were invested in machines for the manufacture of *woollen robes*, of equal and superior value and beauty; thereby encouraging the growers of wool, and the industrious manufacturer, rather than cultivating a taste for the use of buffalo skins; which is just to be acquired, and then, from necessity, to be dispensed with, when a few years shall have destroyed the last of the animals producing them.

It may be answered, perhaps, that the necessaries of life are given in exchange for these robes; but what, I would ask, are the necessities in Indian life, where they have buffaloes in abundance to live on? The Indian's necessities are entirely artificial—are all created; and when the buffaloes shall have disappeared in his country, which will be within *eight* or *ten* years, I would ask, who is to supply him with the necessaries of life then? and I would ask, further, (and leave the question to be answered ten years hence), when the skin shall have been stripped from the back of the last animal, who is to resist the ravages of 300,000 starving savages; and in their trains, 1,500,000 wolves, whom direst necessity will have driven from their desolate and gameless plains, to seek for the means of subsistence along our exposed frontier? God has everywhere supplied man in a state of Nature, with the necessaries of life, and before we destroy the game of his country, or teach him new desires, he has no wants that are not satisfied.

Amongst the tribes who have been impoverished and repeatedly removed, the necessaries of life are extended with a better grace from the hands of civilized man; 90,000 of such have already been removed, and they draw from Government some 5 or 600,000 dollars annually in cash; *which money passes immediately into the hands of white men*, and for it the necessaries of life *may be* abundantly furnished. But who, I would ask, are to furnish the Indians who have been instructed in this unnatural mode—living upon *such* necessaries, and even luxuries of life, extended to them by the hands of white men, when those annuities are at an end, and the skin is stripped from the last of the animals which God gave them for their subsistence?

Reader, I will stop here, lest you might forget to answer these important queries—these are questions which I know will puzzle the world—and, perhaps it is not right that I should ask them.

\* \* \* \* \*

\* Thus much I wrote and painted at this place, whilst on my way up the river: after which I embarked on the steamer for the Yellow Stone, and the sources of the Missouri, through which interesting regions I have made a successful Tour; and have returned, as will have been seen by the foregoing narrations, in my canoe, to this place, from whence I am to descend the river still further in a few days. If I ever get time, I may give further Notes on this place, and of

people and their doings, which I met with here; but at present, I throw my note-book, and canvass, and brushes into my canoe, which will be launched to-morrow morning, and on its way towards St. Louis, with myself at the, steering-oar, as usual: and with Ba'tiste and Bogard to paddle, of whom, I beg the readers' pardon for having said nothing of late, though they have been my constant companions. Our way is now over the foaming and muddy waters of the Missouri, and amid snags and drift logs (for there is a sweeping freshet on her waters), and many a day will pass before other Letters will come from me; and possibly, the reader may have to look to my biographer for the rest. Adieu.

- 1 The reader will be further instructed on this subject, by referring back to PLATE 9, in the beginning of the book.
- 2 The reader will look forward to PLATES 240 and 243, in the Second Volume, for snow shoes.
- 3 The fate of these poor little prisoners, I found was informed on my return to St. Louis a year afterwards, was a very disastrous one. The steamer having a distance of 1600 miles to perform, and lying a week or two on sand bars, in a country where milk could not be procured, they all perished but one, which is now flourishing in the extensive fields of this gentleman.

## Speech of Red Jacket to Mr. Richardson, 1811

Reprinted from the *American Speaker* (1816)

In answer to a speech of Mr. Richardson, who applied to buy the Indian rights to the reservations lying in the territory commonly called the Holland Purchase. Delivered at a council held at Buffalo Creek in May, 1811.

“Brother – We opened our ears to the talk you lately delivered to us, at our council fire. In doing important business it is best not to tell long stories, but to come to it in a few words. We therefore shall not repeat your talk, which is fresh in our minds. We have well considered it, and the advantages and disadvantages of your offers. We request your attention to our answer, which is not from the speaker alone, but from all the Sachems and Chiefs now around our council fire.

“Brother – We know that great men as well as great nations, having different interests have different minds, and do not see the same subject in the same light – but we hope our answer will be agreeable to you and to your employers.

“Brother – Your application for the purchase of our lands is to our minds very extraordinary. It has been made in a crooked manner – you have not walked in the straight path pointed out by the great Council of your nation. You have no writings from the President.

“Brother – In making up our minds we have looked back, and remembered how the Yorkers purchased our lands in former times. They bought them piece by piece for a little money paid to a few men in our nation, and not to all our brethren; our planting and hunting grounds have become very small, and if we sell these we know not where to spread our blankets.

“Brother – You tell us your employers have purchased of the Council of Yorkers a right to buy our lands – we do not understand how this can be – the lands do not belong to the Yorkers; they are ours, and were given to us by the Great Spirit.

“Brother – We think it strange that you should jump over the lands of our brethren in the East, to come to our Council fire so far off, to get our lands. When we sold our lands in the East to the white people, we determined never to sell those we kept, which are as small as we can live comfortably on.

“Brother – You want us to travel with you, and look for other lands. If we should sell our lands and move off into a distant country, toward the setting sun, we should be looked upon in the country to which we go as foreigners, and strangers, and be despised by the red as well as the white men, and we should soon be surrounded by the white men, who will there also kill our game, come upon our lands, and try to get them from us.

“Brother – We are determined not to sell our lands, but to continue on them – we like them – they are fruitful and produce us corn in abundance, for the support of our women and children, and grass and herbs for our cattle.

“Brother – At the treaties held for the purchase of our lands, the white man with sweet voices and smiling faces told us they loved us, and they would not cheat us, but that the king’s children on the other side of the lake would cheat us. When we go on the other side of the lake the king’s children tell us your people will cheat us, but with sweet voices and smiling faces assure us of their love and they will not cheat us. These things puzzle our heads, and we believe that the Indians must take care of themselves, and not trust either in your people or in the king’s children.

“Brother – At a late Council we requested our agents to tell you that we would not sell our lands, and we think you have not spoke to our agents, or they would have informed you so, and we should not have met you at our Council fire at this time.

“Brother – The white people buy and sell false rights to our lands; your employers have, you say, paid a great price for their right; they must have plenty of money, to spend it in buying false right to lands belonging to the Indians; the loss of it will not hurt them, but our lands are of great value to us, and we wish you to go back with your talk to your employers, and to tell them and the Yorkers that they have no right to buy and sell false rights to our lands.

“Brother – We hope you clearly understand the words we have spoken. This is all we have to say.”

Source: *American Speaker*. Third ed. (Philadelphia: Abraham Small, 1816), pp. 379–81.

*George Catlin and His Indian Gallery*  
Images and Commentary by Joan Carpenter Troccoli

A portfolio of thirty-two images (black & white) with commentary from George Gurney and Therese Heyman, editors, *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery* (Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2002).



*Portrait of George Catlin, 1796-1872, by William Fisk, 1796-1872, oil, 50 x 40 in., 1849, NPG.70.14, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; Transfer from the Smithsonian American Art Museum; gift of Miss May C. Kinney, Ernest C. Kinney, and Bradford Wickes, 1945.*

This portrait, painted in London as much from imagination as from life, presents the artist as he wished to be seen. Suited in buckskin, brushes and palette in hand, the fifty-three-year-old Catlin poses in his wilderness “studio”---a tipi in a bustling Blackfoot town on the Upper Missouri. Behind the artist stand figures adapted from Catlin’s portraits of Iron Horn and Woman Who Strikes Many.



*Clara Bartlett Gregory Catlin*, by George Catlin 1828, watercolor, 2 1/2 x 2 1/16 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Catherine Walden Myer Fund, 1948.4.1

Clara Gregory, daughter of a prominent family from Albany, New York, married George Catlin in 1828. Clara was tougher than she looks. She waited patiently for George to complete his western tours, sharing the financial ups and downs of his career. In 1840, Clara followed George to England with three young daughters in tow; a son was born in London in 1843. Her death in Paris from pneumonia in 1845 marked the beginning of the family's disintegration.



*Portrait of a Woman*, 1825--30, oil, 25 x 19 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1984.139.1

This portrait's awkward homespun style helps explain Catlin's decision to go west. The artist moved from Philadelphia to New York in 1825, just as the city was becoming the capital of American commerce and art. Catlin couldn't measure up to the competition: a prominent critic, William Dunlap, labeled him "utterly incompetent." Catlin painted portraits in several other eastern cities, but they were little better. By 1828 he had resolved to try his luck in the West.



*St. Louis from the River Below*, 1832--33, oil, 19 3/8 x 26 7/8 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.311

Catlin began his first long sojourn in the wilderness on the steamboat *Yellowstone*, which serviced the American Fur Company's trading posts along the Missouri River. In 1832, its second year of operation, the *Yellowstone* became the first steamboat to chug from the frontier capital of St. Louis all the way up the Missouri to its confluence with the Yellowstone River in present-day North Dakota, taking Catlin deep into the frontier.



*River Bluffs, 1320 Miles above St. Louis*, 1832, oil, 11 1/4 x 14 1/2 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.399

Catlin's dreamy views of sunlit bluffs on the Upper Missouri preserve a now-lost world. Indians had shaped this landscape by setting fires that curbed tree growth; when the Indians were gone, so were the beautiful clear-cut outlines of these slopes.



*La-dóo-ke-a, Buffalo Bull, a Grand Pawnee Warrior*, Pawnee, 1832, oil, 29 x 24 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.100

This unfinished portrait of a Chaui Pawnee provides a key to Catlin's working methods in the West, where speed was of the essence. During Buffalo Bull's sitting, Catlin focused on his face and his totem (the buffalo head painted on his chest, partially hidden behind a large peace medal). The artist usually finished bodies and costume details in an urban studio.



*Shón-ka-ki-he-ga, Horse Chief, Grand Pawnee Head Chief, Pawnee, 1832, oil, 29 x 24 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.99*

Catlin called his Indian Gallery a “collection of Nature’s dignitaries.” He painted many tribes and learned through experience to choose his individual subjects with care, honoring traditions and tribal sensibilities by seeking out leaders and others of extraordinary talent or accomplishment, the “dignitaries” who represented the best in a community.



*Prairie Meadows Burning*, 1832, oil, 11 x 14 1/8 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.374

Prairie fires, sometimes natural and sometimes set by Indians, cleared out saplings, shrubs, and dead brush and promoted regeneration of nutritious grasses that attracted buffalo herds. The most dramatic fires occurred in the tallgrass, where prairie grasses approach the height of a man. Catlin described such a conflagration as a “raging tempest . . . rolling over the land its swelling waves of liquid fire.”



*Buffalo Bulls in a Wallow*, 1837--39, oil, 24 x 29 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.425

Big, strong, wild, and at one time incredibly populous, bison were a symbol of America's natural wealth. Catlin studied the "manners and customs" of this quintessential western animal as thoroughly as those of any Indian community. Here, the male of the species enjoys a "*delectable laver*"---a cooling mud bath in a puddle he has excavated with his hooves and horns in a low-lying patch of prairie.



*Sioux Encamped on the Upper Missouri, Dressing Buffalo Meat and Robes*, 1832, oil, 11 1/4 x 14 1/2 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.377

Plains Indian economies ran on bison. The animals provided food, clothing, shelter, weapons, toys, buffalo chips for fuel, and even transportation. Men hunted buffalo; processing the kill was women's work. They prepared the meat for storage by drying it on racks, and they used the animals' brains to dress their hides. Already in Catlin's time, the hide trade was leading tribes to kill more animals than they needed for sustenance.



*Máh-to-tóh-pa, Four Bears, Second Chief, in Full Dress*, Mandan/Numakiki, 1832, oil, 29 x 24 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.128

“No tragedian,” Catlin wrote, “ever trod the stage, nor gladiator ever entered the Roman Forum, with more grace and manly dignity” than did Four Bears as he arrived for his sitting. He wore a shirt decorated with pictographic accounts of his war feats, embroidered deerskin leggings, and a bear claw necklace. His headdress of eagle feathers and ermine was crowned with buffalo horns, which convey his “exceeding valour, worth, and power.” Catlin rewarded him with a splendid likeness that is one of the most influential American portraits ever painted.



*Bird's-eye View of the Mandan Village, 1800 Miles above St. Louis, Mandan/Numakiki, 1837--39*, oil, 24 1/8 x 29 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.502

The Mandan lived in permanent lodges constructed of wood and earth scattered around an open area. At the center was a barrel-like structure called the “Big Canoe,” the focal point of public and religious events. The innermost circle of houses was reserved for the community’s most important citizens and the “medicine-lodge.” Over its door towered four “scare crows”---thirty-foot wooden poles topped with figures made of trade cloth and the sacred and precious skin of a white buffalo.



*Stán-au-pat, Bloody Hand, Chief of the Tribe*, Arikara/Sahnish, 1832, oil, 29 x 24 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.123

Catlin was fortunate to meet Bloody Hand and his daughter when they were visiting the smaller of the two Mandan towns. Since 1823, when traders from the American Fur Company allied with the Sioux to attack and destroy their village, the Arikara had harbored “hostile and deadly” feelings toward all whites.



*Peh-tó-pe-kiss, Eagle's Ribs, a Piegan Chief*, Blackfoot, 1832, oil, 29 x 24 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.152

Fur traders and government Indian agents often certified the accuracy of Catlin's pictures, an important service for an artist who proclaimed that the value of his work lay in its authenticity rather than its aesthetic quality. This portrait, painted at Fort Union, bears a certificate signed by the Indian agent John Sanford.



*Comanche Warriors, with White Flag, Receiving the Dragoons*, Comanche/Nium, 1834--35, oil, 24 1/8 x 29 1/8 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.353

In 1830, Congress created the Indian Territory and passed the Indian Removal Act, mandating that Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, and Chicksaw move from the southern states to land west of the Mississippi. Tensions flared between the indigenous tribes and newcomers. By 1834, a troop of United States Dragoons (cavalry) was sent from Fort Gibson near present-day Tulsa to summon the Comanche and neighboring tribes to a peace council. Catlin trekked with the expedition in the killing summer heat across what is now Oklahoma to the Wichita Mountains.



*Káh-kée-tsee, Thighs, a Wichita Woman*, Wichita, 1834, oil, 29 x 24 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.58

Catlin, felled by either malaria or dysentery, which also killed a third of the 455 dragoons, did not reach the expedition's ultimate destination, a Wichita village in extreme southwestern Oklahoma. Though he made his Wichita portraits at the Comanche village, however, Catlin's boast of "going farther to get sitters, than any of my fellow-artists ever did" was justified.



*Kotz-a-tó-ah, Smoked Shield, a Distinguished Warrior*, Kiowa, 1834, oil, 29 x 24 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.63

Smoked Shield's most notable accessory is his shield, made of the heaviest part of a buffalo hide and smoked over a campfire to make it even tougher, a technique, Catlin claimed, also used by the ancient Greeks. Smoked Shield is draped with what appears to be a trade blanket, perhaps due to a shortage of buffalo robes caused by depletion of the southern herds through over-hunting.



*Hátchoo-túc-knee, Snapping Turtle, a Half-breed,* Choctaw, 1834, oil, 29 x 24 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.296

Like the Cherokee, Creek, Chicksaw, and Seminole, the Choctaw had interacted (and intermarried) with whites for centuries. These “Civilized Tribes” were farmers, plantation owners, and educated professionals. Snapping Turtle, also known as Peter Pitchlynn, was a graduate of the University of Nashville and Catlin’s source for “much curious and valuable information, of the history and traditions of his tribe.” All the remaining “Civilized Tribes” were evicted by the military from their tribal homes in the southeast and forced west on the Trail of Tears in 1837--38, with great loss of life.



*Stu-mick-o-súcks, Buffalo Bull's Back Fat, Head Chief, Blood Tribe, Blackfoot, 1832, oil, 29 x 24 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.149*

Catlin's most magnificent portrait was painted at Fort Union "from the free and vivid realities of life" rather than "the haggard deformities and distortions of disease and death" so often found among frontier Indians. This commanding portrait was exhibited to favorable notice in the Paris Salon of 1846. Buffalo Bull's Back Fat (named after the most delectable cut of bison) was from the northernmost Plains tribes. Catlin admired these tribes most and considered them most free of European-American influence. His portrayal conveys the dignity of this great leader of a still-sovereign people.



*Wi-jún-jon, Pigeon's Egg Head (The Light), a Distinguished Young Warrior,*  
 Assiniboine/Nakoda, 1831, oil, 29 x 24 in.  
 Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.179



*Wi-jún-jon, Pigeon's Egg Head (The Light) Going to and Returning from Washington,*  
 Assiniboine/Nakoda, 1837--39, oil, 29 x 24 in.  
 Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.474

Catlin painted Pigeon's Egg Head twice. The Assiniboine warrior, en route to Washington to meet President Jackson and view the wonders of civilization, arrived for his first sitting in St. Louis in December 1831, beautifully "plumed and tinted," but looking "as sullen as death," as if already conscious of his grim fate.

Eighteen months later, the artist met Pigeon's Egg Head on his return home to the northern Plains. In this before-and-after portrait, Catlin depicted the Assiniboine in his buckskin suit, in tune with the noble architecture of the Capitol in the background. With his general's uniform and umbrella, fan, and bottles of whiskey, all gifts of the government, he made a far less harmonious sight. The final indignity was "a pair of water-proof boots, with high heels, which made him 'step like a yoked hog.'" His tribesmen rejected his descriptions of the white man's cities, and his persistence in telling "evil lies" eventually led to his murder. Catlin's message---civilization corrupts Indian culture---doesn't get much clearer than this.



*Dying Buffalo, Shot With an Arrow*, 1832--33, oil, 24 x 29 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.407

Catlin marveled at the herds that rolled in mighty numbers across the plains, but he predicted that the buffalo would soon be extinct, ensuring the extinction of the Plains Indians' way of life as well. Already in Catlin's time, Plains Indians were killing bison in increasing numbers (and taking extra wives to prepare the hides) to take advantage of trading opportunities. But relentless expansion across the West also exacted a heavy toll on herds as need increased for meat and materials, demands that played well within a broader U.S. government policy of killing bison to further breakdown of native cultures and increase their dependence on the government. Catlin's grisly portrait of a dying buffalo bull, killed by the artist's own bullet, is his memento mori for the bison and the Plains Indians.



*Pipestone Quarry, on the Coteau des Prairies*, 1836--37, oil, 19 1/2 x 27 1/4 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.337

Catlin's final western tour was to the Pipestone Quarry in southwestern Minnesota, a rich deposit of red steatite used by many tribes to make pipe bowls. Off limits to non-Indians, the quarry was guarded by Santee Sioux protecting their economic interest as well as the sanctity of the resource, from which, they believed, the Great Spirit had fashioned man himself. Although Catlin exaggerated various features of the site, his findings won him honor: pipestone was christened catlinite. Unfortunately, his account of his visit aroused his critics, who disputed his claim of being the first white man to investigate the quarry.



*Interior View of the Medicine Lodge, Mandan O-kee-pa Ceremony*, Mandan/Numakiki, 1832, oil, 23 x 27 3/4 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.504



*Bull Dance, Mandan O-kee-pa Ceremony*, Mandan/Numakiki, 1832, oil, 23 1/4 x 28 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.505

The centerpiece of the Mandan religious calendar was the annual enactment of the O-kee-pa, a four-day ceremony that included the painful initiation of the most promising young men of the tribe. Their ordeal began with a four-day fast, strictly supervised by a priest in the medicine lodge.

While the young men were sequestered inside the medicine lodge, the general public petitioned the Great Spirit for fertility and an abundant supply of bison in a series of activities outside. Each participant in the Bull Dance wore an entire buffalo skin, head, horns, hooves, and tail included. They repeated the dance forty times over the course of the O-kee-pa, imitating the movements of a buffalo “whilst they were looking out of its eyes as through a mask.”



*Múk-a-tah-mish-o-káh-kaik, Black Hawk, Prominent Sac Chief,* Sac and Fox, 1832, oil, 29 x 24 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.2



*Kee-o-kúk, The Watchful Fox, Chief of the Tribe,* Sac and Fox, 1835, oil, 29 x 24 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.

The great warrior Black Hawk led the Sac and Fox in their heroic but doomed Black Hawk War of 1832, a last-ditch attempt to regain control of tribal farmland in Illinois. Following his capture after the final battle, he was held prisoner at a military installation near St. Louis. Catlin encountered him there at the end of his 1832 tour of the Upper Missouri and, in keeping with his practice of making portraits of significant individuals, captured his likeness.

By 1833, Catlin exhibited the Indian Gallery in Pittsburgh, Louisville, Cincinnati, New Orleans, and elsewhere. By fall 1837, he was ready for the major East Coast cities. He boosted attendance and enlivened the show by lecturing on several hundred paintings placed one by one on an easel. Catlin also invited Indian leaders in the east on other business to appear. His guests endorsed his accuracy, putting the lie to critics who questioned his reports from the West. When Black Hawk, the biggest Indian celebrity of the 1830s, attended an exhibition of the Indian Gallery in New York in 1837, both press and public turned out in force.

Keokuk was chief of the Sac and Fox, and his rivalry with his lead warrior Black Hawk illustrates the divisions that resulted within tribes as they sought to deal with the United States government. Unlike Black Hawk, who fought U.S. expansion, Keokuk thought warfare with the United States fruitless and signed over land in Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin. Their differences, played out over decades, highlight the era's disruption and the ultimate futility in retaining tribal sovereignty against frontier settlement.



*Os-ce-o-lá, The Black Drink, a Warrior of Great Distinction*, Seminole, 1838, oil, 30 7/8 x 25 7/8 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.301

During the 1830s, Osceola led the Seminoles of Florida in their long war against Indian Removal. At war's end, in January 1838, he was imprisoned at Fort Moultrie, South Carolina. When Catlin received a government commission to paint man of such stature, he closed his exhibition in New York for several weeks to travel there, completing the portrait just in time: almost immediately after the sitting, Osceola died of a throat infection and, in Catlin's opinion, a "broken spirit." The tragedy of Osceola's life and death and the government's misguided Indian policy were not lost on Catlin, but it did not stifle his instinct for profit either. Instead of delivering the picture to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington, Catlin added it to his gallery and published lithographs priced at \$1.50 apiece.



*Theodore Burr Catlin in Indian Costume*, 1838, oil, 56 x 45 3/4 x 3 3/4 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.386,323



*Four Dancers*, Ojibwe/Chippewa, 1843--44, oil, 24 x 29 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.386,43

Catlin's Indian Gallery was not your typical Victorian art show. The tireless artist cooked up promotions, delivered lectures, conducted tours, hosted receptions for the press, and attempted to capitalize on highly placed contacts. Beginning in 1840, Catlin also staged the first Wild West shows, and his early casts featured English men and boys, dressed in costumes from the artist's own collection, who sang, danced, and whooped their way through mock battles. Catlin's nephew Burr was always up for the artist's publicity stunts.

The Indian Gallery did well in London and other British cities, but inevitably its novelty wore off. To rekindle interest, Catlin added a new attraction in 1843: nine genuine Ojibwe from Canada, who danced, sang, and "scalped" enemies, to the delight of the crowd. Not everyone was charmed: Charles Dickens dismissed the group as a "party of Indians squatting and spitting . . . or dancing their miserable jigs after their own dreary manner."



*Shon-ta-yi-ga, Little Wolf, a Famous Warrior*, Iowa, 1844, oil, 29 x 24 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.521



*Scalp Dance, Sioux*, Western Sioux/Lakota, 1845–48, oil, 26 1/4 x 32 1/2 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.438b

On the heels of the installation of the Indian Gallery in the Louvre came another signal honor: Catlin was invited to exhibit in the Paris Salon, France's premier art show. On the basis of this powerful portrait and the equally impressive *Buffalo Bull's Back Fat*, Catlin was praised by Charles Baudelaire, the most important French critic of the age, for capturing "the proud, free character and noble expression of these splendid fellows in a masterly way."

Catlin received a commission from King Louis-Philippe, who had spent two years in the late 1790s in the United States, to paint fifteen large canvases. Catlin may have been inspired by the old masters in French museums, as he produced the most carefully detailed and highly finished works of his career. Here, he turned a rudimentary composition sketched at Fort Pierre in 1832 into a full-blown and dramatically illuminated spectacle.



George Catlin (1796-1872) *Batiste and I Running Buffalo, Mouth of the Yellowstone*, 1832-33, oil, 24 x 29 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.421



**George Catlin (1796-1872), *River Bluffs, 1320 Miles above St. Louis*, 1832, oil, 11 1/4 x 14 1/2 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.399**



George Catlin (1796-1872), *Buffalo Bulls Fighting in Running Season, Upper Missouri, 1837-1839*, oil, 24 x 29 in.  
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.424



**George Catlin (1796-1872), *Máh-to-tóh-pa, Four Bears, Second Chief, in Full Dress*, (Mandan/Numakiki) 1832, oil, 29 x 24 in.  
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.128**