INTRODUCTION

From Common Ground

I wonder if the ground has anything to say? I wonder if the ground is listening to what is said? I wonder if the ground would come alive and what is on it?

We-ah Te-na-tee-ma-ny,
or "Little Chief" (Cayuse), 1855[1]

SHORTLY AFTER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF Badlands National Monument in 1929, the Oglala Sioux spiritual leader Black Elk expressed profound consternation with the idea of wilderness preservation. For him, the creation of the national monument adjacent to his home on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota seemed only to confirm a disturbing trend. Wind Cave National Park had already been established in the nearby Black Hills, and large areas of land surrounding the park had recently been incorporated into a national forest. Remembering his youth and the time he spent in these areas, Black Elk recalled that his people "were happy in [their] own country, and were seldom hungry, for then the two-leggeds and the four-leggeds lived together like relatives, and there was plenty for them and for us." Although a considerable portion of this Sioux country received federal protection, native peoples were largely excluded from their former lands. As Black Elk observed, the Americans had "made little islands for us and other little islands for the four-leggeds," and every year the two were moving farther and farther apart.[2] In short, Black Elk understood all too well that wilderness preservation went hand in hand with native dispossession.

The dual "island" system of nature preserves and Indian reservations did not originate in the 1920s. At least until Black Elk's early childhood, Americans generally conceived of the West as a vast "Indian wilderness," and they rarely made a

distinction between native peoples and the lands they inhabited. Consequently, the earliest national park advocates hoped to protect "wild" landscapes and the people who called these places home. Preservationist efforts did not succeed until the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, when outdoor enthusiasts viewed wilderness as an uninhabited Eden that should be set aside for the benefit and pleasure of vacationing Americans. The fact that Indians continued to hunt and light purposeful fires in such places seemed only to demonstrate a marked inability to appreciate natural beauty. To guard against these "violations," the establishment of the first national parks necessarily entailed the exclusion or removal of native peoples.

The transition in American conceptions of wilderness resulted from several deeper trends in U.S. society and politics. The powerful sense of national destiny that accompanied both the Mexican War and the Civil War, the increased activism of the federal government during Reconstruction, the growth of western tourism, and the widespread sentimentalism for a "vanishing" frontier profoundly shaped the ways that Americans would perceive the "New West" for several decades. For many people, the processes of conquest and nation building seemed to alter the essential nature of the region; through a sort of patriotic transubstantiation, a number of western landscapes quickly became American Canterburys. More than great "pleasureground[s] for the benefit and enjoyment of the people," the first national parks were places where summer pilgrims could go to share their national identity and an appreciation for natural beauty.[3] Much as they still do today, Yosemite Valley, the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, and the ragged peaks of the northern Rocky Mountains provided the basic elements of a scenic anthem that praised the grandeur and power of the United States.

The idealization of uninhabited landscapes and the establishment of the first national parks also reflect important developments in late-nineteenth-century Indian policy. Much as the conquest of the West reshaped ideas about wilderness, it also led to the creation of an extensive reservation system. Ultimately, these isolated patches of land came to represent the final refuge of the American Indian, and by the late 1860s and early 1870s, Americans regarded reservations, rather than the "wilderness," as the appropriate place for all Indians to live. These sentiments changed somewhat in the following decades, when self-described friends of the Indian sought to dismantle the reservations and assimilate native peoples into American society. While such "friends" argued that an Indian's place was not on the reservation, they asserted even more emphatically that an Indian's place was not in the wilderness—except on the odd chance that one had become a "civilized" tourist.

Changing ideas and policies did not make native peoples disappear, however, nor did they make wilderness uninhabited. Although the creation of the first national parks coincided with efforts to restrict Indians to reservations and assimilate them into American society, native use and occupancy of park lands often continued unabated. A basic argument of this book is that uninhabited wilderness had to be created before it could be preserved, and this type of landscape became reified in the first national parks. In particular, I focus on the policies of

Indian removal developed at Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Glacier national parks from the 1870s to the 1930s. These parks are especially relevant for three reasons: first, each supported a native population at the time of its establishment; second, the removal of Indians from these parks became precedents for the exclusion of native peoples from other holdings within the national park system; and third, as the grand symbols of American wilderness, the uninhabited landscapes preserved in these parks have served as models for preservationist efforts, and native dispossession, the world over.[4]

Generations of preservationists, government officials, and park visitors have accepted and defended the uninhabited wilderness preserved in national parks as remnants of a priori Nature (with a very capital *N*). Such a conception of wilderness forgets that native peoples shaped these environments for millennia, and thus parks like Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Glacier are more representative of old fantasies about a continent awaiting "discovery" than actual conditions at the time of Columbus's voyage or Lewis and Clark's adventure.[5] For the most part, these romantic visions of primordial North America have contributed to a sort of widespread cultural myopia that allows late-twentieth-century Americans to ignore the fact that national parks enshrine recently dispossessed landscapes.

In the past few years, a number of scholars have argued that wilderness is not an absolute condition of Nature but is instead a fairly recent American invention.[6] While I share the conviction that wilderness is both a historical and cultural construct, I believe that such a definition requires an examination of the events and processes that led to the creation of this particular artifact. Doing so should also make plain the manner in which popular conceptions of certain wilderness areas have precluded alternate visions of the same landscapes. Ultimately, an understanding of the context and motives that led to the idealization of uninhabited wilderness not only helps to explain what national parks actually preserve but also reveals the degree to which older cultural values continue to shape current environmentalist and preservationist thinking.

The American wilderness ideal, as it has developed over the last century, necessarily includes a number of strange notions about native peoples and national parks. In the rare instances that park literature even mentions Indians, they tend to assume the unthreatening guise of "first visitors."[7] Just like tourists today, it seems these ancient nature lovers did not really use or occupy future park areas. Apparently, they possessed an innate appreciation for wilderness as a place where, to paraphrase the 1964 Wilderness Act, humans are visitors who do not remain.[8] Amazingly, if we follow this reasoning to its logical extreme, the park service has managed to protect the only areas on the North American continent that Indians did not use on a regular basis.

Of course, this all sounds absurd, but scholars and park officials alike have long asserted that native peoples avoided national park areas because these places were not conducive to use or occupation.[9] Yet nothing could be further from the truth. The foothills, mountains, and canyons of most western parks provided shelter from winter storms and summer heat, sustained seasonal herds of important game animals, and served as the locale for tribal gatherings and important re-

ligious celebrations. In short, native peoples made extensive use of these areas—often well into the twentieth century. To the degree that such practices ceased, the lack of use was the result of policies to keep Indians away from these areas. Unfortunately, subsequent denials of native claims on parks have served only to perpetuate the legacy of native dispossession.

Besides taking issue with park histories that ignore the presence of Indians, this book also examines the changing importance of Yellowstone, Glacier, and Yosemite national parks for several different native groups. The people with the strongest connections to these parks include the Crow, Shoshone, and Bannock in Yellowstone; the Blackfeet in Glacier; and the Yosemite Indians in Yosemite. All have very distinct traditions, and the native presence in one park hardly resembled that in another. Blackfeet use of Glacier National Park, for instance, differed markedly from that of the Indians in Yosemite. Likewise, native use of both these places changed considerably from the middle of the nineteenth century to the 1930s, as had the lifeways of the people who lived in these areas. At Yellowstone, several groups could occupy the same general area at the same time but often for very different purposes. At all of these parks and within each Indian community, a great deal of task differentiation by gender and age group also determined the seasonal or historical importance of a particular area. During the early reservation era, for instance, male hunters accounted for most Blackfeet use of the Glacier area in summer and fall. In earlier and later periods, however, women used the area more frequently, particularly in spring and early summer, when they gathered important food and medicinal plants.

Despite their often pronounced differences, the Crow, Shoshone, Bannock, Blackfeet, and Yosemite all shared important similarities: each utilized or lived within a national park at the time of its establishment, all were affected by federal efforts to preserve certain western landscapes, none ever fully relinquished their claims to these areas in a treaty with the United States, and each park remained important to these different groups because it was large enough to protect and sustain numerous resources. While these native groups all present a powerful challenge to long-held ideas about pristine wilderness and its preservation, their use of national park lands also sheds new light on the continuing but changing significance of such areas for many Indian peoples. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a series of harsh assimilationist programs required their adoption of new land use practices both on and off the reservation and threatened to destroy tribal societies.[10] In the midst of these profound changes, many of the places associated with older cultural practices took on new meanings or acquired new importance. Consequently, access to national park lands became a crucial aspect of native efforts to both ensure cultural survival and assert threatened treaty rights.

By examining the political, spiritual, and social importance of national park areas to different native groups, I explore the same issues that inform current American Indian concerns about the management of Devil's Tower National Monument, the industrial and commercial development of the Black Hills,

and the sanctity of ancient religious sites on public lands throughout the West. This book is not just about the sacredness of certain places, however. It also addresses the rights and needs of native peoples to maintain their cultural distinctiveness through the exercise of treaty rights and the practice of certain skills that can take place only within a large national park. Recent concerns about hunting or gathering traditional food and medicinal plants on protected lands are frequently associated with a new round of cultural revivalism among various Indian groups, but these activities are rooted in a century of "illegal" and extralegal use of such areas. While these actions have presented a constant challenge to the idealization of pristine, uninhabited landscapes, they also contributed another "cultural construction" of wilderness—in this case, one in which concerns about subsistence gave way to concerns about cultural persistence and political sovereignty.

To show the ways that native peoples and wilderness enthusiasts have valued and shaped three of the nation's oldest and most revered parks, I have chosen to present this study in four parts. The first two chapters examine the ideas and historical processes that eventually led to the almost simultaneous development of national parks and Indian reservations in the years following the Civil War. The subsequent discussions of Yellowstone, Glacier, and Yosemite focus on the native histories of each park and the ways that preservationist ideals shaped policies of Indian removal or exclusion. Although the early history of Yellowstone demonstrates a close connection between the evolution of national parks and that of Indian reservations, Glacier presents a maturation of these two related but conflicting institutions. Both Yellowstone and Glacier served as important models for later preservationist efforts, and each one indirectly inspired the policies of Indian removal developed at Yosemite in the 1930s. Native residence in Yosemite Valley developed from a number of unique conditions, but park officials sought to emulate conditions in other national parks once the presence of Indians proved too exceptional. Although Indian removal has largely made these parks into American symbols of wilderness, continued restrictions on native use of park lands remain an important point of contention between many Indian tribes and the Department of the Interior. For that reason, I end this study with a chapter that connects the histories of these three parks with current concerns about nature preserves and indigenous rights throughout the United States.

As America's holiest shrines, national parks reflect a whole spectrum of ideas about nation, culture, and even natural origins. The examples of Yellowstone, Glacier, and Yosemite national parks clearly illustrate these tendencies. The early history of these parks also demonstrates how different groups, with opposing ideas about the importance of a particular place, often expressed their concerns in remarkably similar terms—and were often motivated by similar needs and historical processes. While culturally distinct and with radically different ideas about wilderness and place, Indians and non-Indians have both looked on national parks as crucial to their political, cultural, and even spiritual identity. So far, this similarity has provided only the common ground on which to base a series of

profound disagreements. If anything, national parks serve as a microcosm for the history of conflict and misunderstanding that has long characterized the unequal relations between the United States and native peoples. As common ground, however, national parks might also provide an important arena of understanding and resolution—and it is toward that goal that I devote this book.

I

LOOKING BACKWARD AND WESTWARD

The "Indian Wilderness" in the Antebellum Era

> The [Indian] nations will continue to wander over those plains, and the wild animals, the elk, the buffaloe, will long be found there; for until our country becomes supercharged with population, there is scarcely any probability of settlers venturing far into these regions. A different mode of life, habits altogether new, would have to be developed.
>
> Henry M. Brackenridge, 1817[1]

TRAVELING SLOWLY UP THE Missouri River in the summer of 1832, George Catlin constantly marveled at the grand vistas stretching off to the horizon in every direction. Choked with snags and thick with mud from the spring floods, the brown waters of the Missouri cut a broad ribbon through an endless expanse of green plains, white clouds, and blue sky. For Catlin, this was "fairy land" and he never tired of "indulging [his] eyes in the boundless pleasure of roaming over the thousand hills, and bluffs, and dales, and ravines."[2] Having come west to "immerse [himself] in the Indian Country [and produce] a literal and graphic delineation of the . . . manners, customs, and character of an interesting race of people," the beauty of the landscape unfolding before him only strengthened his resolve to visit every tribe on the continent. As much as he gloried in the scenery of the upper Missouri, he could also foresee the future demise of the vast herds of buffalo, elk, and antelope that scattered in all directions whenever the steamboat on which he traveled pushed close to shore. Consequently, his enthusiasm about the landscape and the people who called it home was tempered by a sense of desperation to describe and paint all that he saw before it fell to the "desolating hands of cultivating man."[3]

Catlin had a keen sense that his success as a painter would derive from the ephemeral nature of his subject, but he did not relish the underpinnings of his

future fame. Instead, he hoped that some portion of the region over which he traveled might be set off from development to inspire future generations of painters and travelers as they became "further . . . isolated from . . . pristine wildness and beauty." In what many scholars have identified as the first expression of the national park idea, Catlin proposed that "some great protecting policy of government" preserve a large expanse of land in all "its pristine beauty and wildness . . . where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his horse . . . amid the fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes." Such a "magnificent" area, he exclaimed, would be a "*nation's Park* containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty!"[4]

The great stands of cottonwood that once crowded the Missouri's banks have long since been thinned by the very steamboats that carried travelers like Catlin. Likewise, the rolling plains have given way to farms, ranches, and small cities like Bismarck and Pierre, while long stretches of the river itself have become artificial lakes behind Gavins Point, Fort Randall, Oahe, and Garrison dams. Nevertheless, some of what impressed Catlin in the 1830s seems almost unchanged, and preserved areas like Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota serve as small replicas of the places Catlin wrote about and painted. For Catlin and his contemporaries, however, the protected scenic areas that might inspire a traveler today would seem horribly empty. Indeed, Catlin had traveled to the plains to experience what was then called an "Indian wilderness," and he would no doubt describe these areas today as "vast and idle waste[s], unstocked and unpeopled for ages."[5]

Environmentalists, park officials, and historians have long regarded Catlin as the patriarch of an intellectual genealogy that includes Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and the environmental movement of the past three decades. In doing so, they have largely ignored the fact that Catlin's conception of a wilderness preserve included the presence of Indians; they found, instead, only those elements that reflected on later preservation efforts. Scholars who acknowledge Catlin's desire to incorporate native peoples within a national park have generally dismissed it as something unique to his own particular interests. For them, Catlin is a man out of time: His ideas about national parks somehow foreshadowed twentieth-century concerns and policies regarding wilderness preservation; his concern for Indians, however, was either anachronistic or simply aberrant.[6]

While the devotion of his entire adult life to preserving and recording an "Indian wilderness" may have marked him off from his fellows, Catlin differed from his contemporaries only in the strength of his convictions, not in the substance of his ideas. Antebellum Americans did not conceive of wilderness and Indians as separate; indeed, the felicity with which we can speak of one *and* the other, wilderness *and* Indians, would not have been so readily conceivable in Catlin's age. Since the colonial era, Anglo-American conceptions of native peoples and wilderness had operated within the framework of a self-reciprocating maxim: forests were wild because Indians and beasts lived there, and Indians were wild because they lived in the forests. The majority of antebellum Americans viewed this "Indian wilderness" as an obstacle to progress, but those who expressed concern about the destruction of certain landscapes invariably took an interest in the welfare of the people who lived there.[7] Far from being an anomalous advocate for the protection of wild lands and native peoples, Catlin reflected contemporary ideas about both. Furthermore, his proposal for a "nation's Park" fit within a more widespread lament about the destruction of indigenous homelands that western expansion entailed.[8]

In some respects, Catlin should not be associated with national park history because his proposal hardly resembles any of the parks established later in the century. This is not to say that his ideas were somehow better. Catlin's vision of "classic" Indians grossly ignored the cultural dynamism of native societies, and his park would have created a monstrous combination of outdoor museum, human zoo, and wild animal park. Nevertheless, his ideas should not be dismissed as mere historical curiosities. To understand why his proposal for a national park was superseded by the idealization of uninhabited landscapes in the late nineteenth century, we must first situate it within the artistic, social, and political trends that shaped antebellum America. Doing so will not only provide a clearer understanding of early preservationist thinking but also allow for better recognition of the changing conditions that reshaped American ideas about wilderness and Indians at midcentury. As Henry Brackenridge predicted some fifteen years before Catlin's journey up the Missouri, "different mode[s] of life [and] habits altogether new" would transform American perceptions of the landscapes and peoples of the West.[9] It was these new modes and habits and the policies they engendered that ultimately led to the creation of the first reservations and national parks later in the century.

American Romanticism and the "Indian Wilderness"

Catlin's view of wilderness reflected the romantic ideals that had defined Western intellectual thought since the eighteenth century. In large part a reaction to both Continental rationalism and British empiricism, romanticism exalted intuition and personal experience over formalism and scientific precision. Celebrating the individual's soul—the "egotistical sublime," as the poet John Keats put it—romantics often denigrated urban life and turned to wild nature for inspiration. Consequently, wilderness not only offered an escape from society but also provided the ideal setting for romantic individuals "to exercise the cult" they made of their own souls.[10] Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed all of these sentiments in 1836 when he implored his countrymen to find "in the wilderness . . . something more dear and connate than in streets or villages." There they would experience "an apparition of God" and find "the organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it."[11]

Because wild landscapes provided the most direct means for experiencing the Divine, romantics also found in the idea of the "natural man" a perfect expression of humanity. As the "children of Nature," the Indians of North America seemed to live free of the oppressive conditions that interminably plagued civi-

lized societies.[12] Such ideas had flourished in Europe since the middle of the eighteenth century, but they did not have a strong impact on intellectual thought in the United States until the 1810s. Even then, American romantics generally regarded the few Indians still remaining in the East as remnants of a race long degraded and debauched by its contact with "civilization." Truly "noble" Indians either lived in the distant past, when America was yet "unspoiled," or roamed the distant lands beyond the Mississippi River.

With its emphasis on intuition and personal experience, romanticism had a profound impact on late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century arts and letters on both sides of the Atlantic. The importance of natural beauty and the primitive—and the close association of both with the American landscape—caused the movement to take a decidedly different turn in the United States. More than a product of abundant natural scenery, however, a distinctly American romanticism grew out of the nationalistic fervor that followed the War of 1812. The idea of wilderness functioned as an important tool for patriotic apologists who felt compelled to refute European claims that the North American landscape was fundamentally flawed because it lacked ancient historical associations and refined pastoral landscapes. What American scenery lacked in European qualities, they argued, it more than compensated with an abundance of wilderness. As the painter Thomas Cole noted in 1833, "The most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery [was] its wildness."[13] Such a strong identification with wilderness was hardly unique to Cole. He was, however, a founding member of the Hudson River School, the most influential group of American landscape painters in the first half of the nineteenth century, and his views had a powerful effect on American arts at this time.

Thomas Cole's own paintings demonstrated that one of the most distinctly American aspects of this "wildness" was the presence of native peoples within a "natural" landscape. No vision of the historical eastern wilderness was complete without reference to Indians, and Cole often inserted them into landscapes that had long since become "sterile and civilized." He also used images of Indians to arouse a sense of nostalgia and pity in order to give romantic poignancy to a scene, an effect he achieved in nearly all of his most important American landscape paintings, including *The Falls of Kaaterskill* (1826), *View on Lake Winniseeogie* (1828), *Distant View of Niagara Falls* (1830), *View of Shroon Mountain* (1838), and *Indian Pass-Tahawus* (1847). In *American Lake Scene* (1844), which depicts a series of small islands on a calm lake, Cole placed in the foreground a reclining Indian contemplating the tranquil scene. While Cole lavished most of his attention and skill on the landscape and not the small figure, the idea that the Indian appreciated the scene more deeply and more completely than the painter or the viewer defined the mood of the painting. Assuming the pose of a romantic poet or a tragic and pensive figure from classical antiquity, Cole's Indian hardly represented historical reality. Nevertheless, his presence in the scene was wholly consistent with romantic notions of the once noble but ultimately doomed savages of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The idea of wilderness also figured prominently in American letters during the antebellum era, and many writers conflated the nation's political and cultural identity with the aboriginal landscape. Like their counterparts in the visual arts, poets, essayists, and novelists self-consciously based their work on American subjects in an effort to create a national aesthetic. The first American authors to gain both national and international fame came to prominence in the 1820s and 1830s, and all focused on some aspect of Cole's "wildness." Indeed, almost the entire canon of early-nineteenth-century American literature consists of authors who, along with Ralph Waldo Emerson, insisted, "we have listened too long to the courtly muse of Europe" and must turn instead to the American landscape for inspiration.[14] Perhaps as a result of Emerson's exhortation, the works of Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Fenimore Cooper, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Herman Melville all focused on American subjects, and each author ruminated at great length on some aspect of the historical Indian wilderness in his most famous works.

Though outside the canon of American arts and letters, upper-middle-class women in the Northeast not only shared the aesthetic and nationalistic concerns of their male counterparts but also were largely responsible for the dissemination of these ideas through essays and poems in nationally distributed journals. Poets like Lydia Sigourney and Lucretia Davidson were widely read, and their poems about "the beautiful homes of the western men" or "the realm of Nature . . . [and] Nature's lawless child" were collected and reprinted in numerous editions.[15] Such ideas were repeated in the novels of Catharine Sedgewick, whose enormously popular *Hope Leslie* (1827) told of the romantic adventures that befell colonial settlers and their encounters with Indians. As the primary readers of early-nineteenth-century novels, women also determined many of the popular trends in American literature, and their literary tastes inspired the long slew of stories and novels about life among wild Indians that flooded the American market in the 1830s and 1840s.[16]

The fascination with peculiarly American themes and subjects was not limited to an elite circle of men and women in and around Boston and New York City, and the preoccupation with wildness reached far beyond their narrow social enclaves. As the literary historian Cecilia Tichi has noted, ideas about the Indian wilderness bordered on a "cultural obsessiveness" that reached across regional lines and "broke boundaries of genre, caste, and philosophical persuasion."[17] Though he was a defender of old republican virtues and a child of wealth and privilege, perhaps no author better understood the popular fascination with Indians and the frontier than James Fenimore Cooper.[18] In the Leather Stocking tales, a series of five novels published between 1823 and 1841, Cooper invented his most popular hero, Natty Bumpo. Embodying the tension between civilization and wild nature, Natty preferred the company of Indians in the wilderness over the restraints and moral debauchery of frontier settlements. Set during the Revolutionary War and the first decades of the Republic, the novels celebrated a wilderness past and lamented its recent destruction. To some degree, Cooper's

novels assented to the methods by which "civilization" would eventually eclipse all of "primitive America," but he always tinged his narrative with a sense of guilt about "the forward march of progress."[19]

The fascination with wild America in the antebellum era and the profound ambivalence that many felt about the destruction of native societies did not stem entirely from romantic sensibilities. In many respects, ideas about the Indian wilderness reflected a growing sense of dissatisfaction with American politics and society. As nascent industrial and urban growth, increased immigration, and bitter political campaigns altered established patterns of work and community, public opinion often reflected a pervasive sense of national uncertainty and self-criticism. Furthermore, the growing rift between North and South, the persistence of slavery, and increasingly pronounced divisions between ethnic and religious groups undermined any sense of national unity and deflated the egalitarian rhetoric of political leaders. Together, these profound changes inspired a number of religious and secular reform movements to purify American society, and public debate often degenerated into a cacophony of local and national criticism. Not surprisingly, the Indian wilderness proved an ideal foil for social critics who used it as a corrective symbol of all that was wrong with America.[20]

Despite widespread criticism, a basic optimism characterized the antebellum era and actually provided the main impetus for most reform groups. As Alexis de Tocqueville observed in 1831, Americans regarded their society as being in a constant "state of improvement in which nothing is, or ought to be, permanent." [21] In other words, Americans remained ever critical of the present and always hopeful of the future. Such attitudes allowed many to bemoan what Thomas Cole called the routine desecration of "Nature's beauty . . . by what is called improvement" and yet accept it as a necessary part of "the road society has to travel." However lamentable the side effects of national growth and expansion, Americans would have to trust they would eventually "find refinement in the end."[22]

Indian Territory

Such ambivalence about the past and optimism for the future had a profound effect on government policy toward native peoples in the first half of the nineteenth century. Almost since the beginning of the Republic, government officials had struggled to develop an acceptable method for achieving what they referred to as "expansion with honor"—that is, how to incorporate tribal territories into the United States without belligerently undermining native societies. In theory, there were only two solutions to this moral quandary: assimilation or removal. While both required force or the threat of force, each had the peculiar virtue of transforming Indian lands into American farms and towns. On the face of things, assimilation was more "honorable" than outright dispossession, but few Americans accepted the possibility that a "Red Man" could become a fellow citizen of the United States. By contrast, distant relocation beyond the frontier seemed to

hold the promise of a happy convergence of interests: settlers and speculators could buy land; missionaries could set up permanent missions among Indians without fearing the corrupting influence of nearby white communities; native groups would have an opportunity to incorporate the virtues of civilization at their own pace and, as they did so, have a positive influence on the more "savage" tribes of the eastern plains. Ultimately, removal would seem an ideal panacea for America's chronic "Indian problems," and its visionary appeal would supersede all arguments to the contrary.[23]

Few, if any, native people harbored sanguine views about their removal to the West, and none ever took much comfort in the ambivalent sympathies of artists and writers. For the tribes that attempted to remain in the eastern United States, the pressure of removal policies brought great divisions within each community. Some factions resorted to armed conflict with the United States, as in the Black Hawk War of 1832 that pitted Sauk and Mesquakie warriors against the U.S. Army and the Illinois Militia, or in the Seminole War that lasted from 1834 to 1842. The more famous Cherokee did not take up arms against the United States but instead brought their case against the government to the Supreme Court. They ultimately failed in their efforts to stave off removal, but a small number of Cherokee managed to remain in their Appalachian homeland. Far more perished between 1838 and 1839, however, when at least four thousand individuals died of starvation and exposure on the infamous Trail of Tears.[24]

The relocation of several native groups from the former Northwest Territory and the Southeast sharpened American perceptions of Indians and wilderness in a number of important ways. First, the conflicts generated by removal strengthened ideas about Indians as incapable of living in close proximity to white settlements. Perhaps just as significant, the process of removal also involved the creation of an official Indian Territory. Although the administrative boundaries of this area were eventually limited to present-day Oklahoma, the term Indian Territory broadly applied to all lands north of the Missouri state boundary and west of the Mississippi River, and occasionally referred to parts of northern Michigan. Marked off from the rest of the nation by a so-called Permanent Indian Frontier of strategically located forts, Indian Territory became a place of both the future and the past: here would be the place where Indians could develop the habits of civilized people and eventually become incorporated into the United States; here too was the place where, as James Fenimore Cooper phrased it, those interested in seeing "real" Indians would have to travel if they wished to see them "in any of [their original] savage grandeur."[25]

Like Cooper's pronouncement, George Catlin's decision to travel in Indian Territory reflected the romantic hyperbole that characterized American arts and letters at the time. Nevertheless, his proposal for a "nation's Park" also fit within the larger context of antebellum Indian policies. Although Catlin certainly would have opposed the forced removal of Indians to the West, the creation of a semiformal Indian Territory allowed him to consider a policy that might prevent the further dissolution of some native societies. In this last respect, his views partially coincided with the architects of federal Indian policy, who argued that a clearly

defined Indian Territory would allow the government to better protect native communities from white encroachment. The purpose of such protection was to ensure a more orderly process of assimilation, but Catlin hoped that some effort might be expended to protect the cultural autonomy of more distant tribes. Ultimately, Catlin's proposal represented a significant departure from the ambivalent hope and resignation that characterized antebellum society, and his concern for the lands and peoples he encountered in the West would soon find echoes in the experiences of others who followed in his footsteps.[26]

Of course, the "pristine wildness" that so exhilarated Catlin in the 1830s was the product of recent developments, and several of the tribes he encountered on his journeys had just arrived from their homes east of the Mississippi. Their arrival affected indigenous horticultural groups like the Pawnee, who were already locked in a struggle with Lakota and Dakota nomads that had migrated down from the western Great Lakes region over the previous three generations. By the 1830s, some of the more sedentary peoples had already abandoned their villages and adopted a form of equestrian nomadism that allowed them to compete with the powerful Sioux. Within a few years of their arrival, a number of the emigrant tribes from the East also embraced the life of equestrian nomads in order to hold their own against the mounted hunters and warriors of the plains.[27] In short, the "native Indian . . . galloping his horse" was in the midst of revolutionary social change, and the "nation's Park" that Catlin proposed for the benefit of future generations of Americans was a cluttered arena of cultural contest and transformation.

Whether ancient residents like the Pawnee, more recently established groups like the Lakota, or brand-new immigrants from east of the Mississippi River, none of the native peoples whom Catlin met would have considered their homeland as wild. For the Sauk leader Keokuk, the land beyond the "great river" was a country that his people scarcely knew. But it would be a "new home," where "we will build our wigwams . . . [and] hope the Great Spirit will smile upon us."[28] For Lakota hunters and traders, the upper Missouri country provided a number of important resources for trade with white society and other native communities. Those groups who had resided in the region since time out of memory had a different sense about belonging to the lands they occupied; for the Ponca, the very soil on which they walked was the stuff from which their creator had made them. In every case, as the Omaha anthropologist Francis La Flesche recalled when describing his childhood on the eastern plains, the area was not a "wilderness." Indeed, to all the people of the region it was "clearly defined," and all "knew the boundaries of tribal lands; . . . every stream, the contour of every hill, and each peculiar feature of the landscape had its tradition. It was our home, the scene of our history, and we loved it as our country."[29]

Looking Toward the Western Wilds

Though out of step with native views of their homelands and certainly no more plausible than government promises to "forever secure and guarantee" these western lands to the Indians who lived there, Catlin's vision did reflect some of the reality of federal Indian policy in the 1830s and 1840s. However temporary, the "permanent" Indian frontier lasted long enough to allow a generation of artists, writers, and travelers to experience an Indian wilderness that confirmed all their romantic expectations.[30] Furthermore, western travel was made all the easier by the establishment of military outposts along the semiofficial frontier. Ostensibly designed to protect emigrant tribes from attack by indigenous groups and maintain order along the frontier, the forts also served as places of trade with western tribes and as staging grounds for upriver trappers.[31] In a very real sense, then, the maintenance of a distinct Indian Territory made an "authentic" wilderness experience possible. Ultimately, such experiences would inspire a number of prominent Americans to share Catlin's desire that some part of this region might escape the earlier fate of the eastern wilds.

In the same year that Catlin made his voyage up the Missouri River, Washington Irving returned to the United States after living abroad for seventeen years. Hoping to begin his career anew and charged with a desire to write on distinctly American subjects, he quickly made plans to visit the Indian Territory. As he explained in a letter to his brother, the prospects of such a journey were "too tempting to be resisted: I should have an opportunity of seeing the remnants of those great Indian tribes . . . I should see those fine countries of the 'far west,' while still in a state of pristine wildness, and behold herds of buffaloes scouring their native prairies." In this "tour of the prairies," as the book he later published about his travels would be titled, Irving recognized the opportunity to write on a subject that would celebrate a uniquely American condition. More important, he also saw an opportunity to record a way of life and scenery that seemed fated to "vanish."[32]

While Irving's introduction to the prairies did not lead him immediately to call for the establishment of a wilderness preserve, over the next few years he would come closer to this view in several of his most popular works. In *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville* (1837), Irving drew on his own experiences as well as Bonneville's journal to produce an adventurous story about the captain's military expeditions in the West. Irving intended *Bonneville* to preserve on the page what he termed "the romance of savage life"—the life of trappers, Indians, and wildlife. He did not simply wish to see the western wilderness preserved in print, however, and he expressed a hope that parts of the Rocky Mountains might be preserved in fact as well. Within "an immense belt of rocky mountains and volcanic plains, several hundred miles in width," he wrote in the last pages of *Bonneville*, certain places "must ever remain an irreclaimable wilderness, intervening between the abodes of civilization, and affording a last refuge to the Indian." Although the existence of such a place had more to do with the inaccessibility of the area than any governmental action, Irving hoped it would forever remain inviolate. Located near the headwaters of the Yellowstone and Snake Rivers, this "last refuge" corresponded with the area that later became Yellowstone National Park.[33]

Even more significant than Irving's "sketches of western life," the work of John James Audubon inspired a growing appreciation for the western wilderness.

Much has been written about Audubon's efforts to preserve wildlife, but scholars have paid scant attention to his concern about the demise of Native American societies. Like Catlin and Irving, Audubon's conception of wilderness and the landscapes he hoped to see preserved included native peoples. While on a trip to Labrador in the summer of 1833 to record specimens for his masterwork, *The Birds of America* (1827–1838), he repeatedly lamented the rapid destruction of the region and hoped that some "kind government" would intervene to stop its "shameful destruction." As things then stood, the destruction of deer, caribou, birdlife, and "aboriginal man" led Audubon to observe that "Nature herself seems perishing" and that there seemed to be no place left where one could go and "visit nature undisturbed."[34]

Audubon repeated these sentiments ten years later on his travels through the Ohio River valley. He noted with great sadness the changes that had been wrought on the area where, twenty years before, he had first begun his quest to paint the avian wildlife of North America. Preferring the region's previous condition to that created by its new inhabitants, Audubon recalled the "grandeur and beauty" that once characterized the river and "the dense and lofty summits of the forest . . . that everywhere spread along the hills, and overhung the margins of the streams." But this recollection lacked any of the sweetness of nostalgia. All had been destroyed by "the axe of the settler" in the intervening years; as he noted later, even the remnants of the forest would soon be lost to the "greedy mills" forever. Just as poignantly, he lamented that there were "no longer any Aborigines . . . to be found there, [nor] the vast herds of elks, deer and buffaloes which once pastured on these hills and in these valleys." In short, it was a horrible tragedy that "this grand portion of [the] Union" had not been left "in a state of nature"—with Indians, forests, and wildlife.[35]

Audubon made his trip down the Ohio en route to joining an expedition up the Missouri River. Though fifty-eight years old, he could not resist the opportunity to continue his work in the West. Along the Missouri he found scenery that reminded him of the Ohio River country some twenty years before, and he delighted in the abundance of wildlife and the grand expanse of the prairies and plains. Just twelve years after Catlin's trip up the Missouri, he already saw the effects of white settlements and commercial hunters and predicted the region would soon suffer the fate of the Ohio Valley. Though he marveled at the immense herds of buffalo, Audubon clearly recognized that their numbers were diminishing. As he noted in his journal, "before many years the Buffalo, like the Great Auk, will have disappeared"; he added that "surely this should not be permitted." Furthermore, many of the populous villages that Catlin had visited just a few years before had been decimated by disease, and those tribes that still lived along the Missouri frequently elicited pity from Audubon, their reduced condition a reflection of the impending "doom" that would soon descend upon the whole region.[36]

Educated gentlemen adventurers were not the only ones who traveled to the West, nor were they the only ones to infuse it with romantic qualities. While trapping on the upper Yellowstone River in the fall of 1834, Osborne Russell came

The Indian wilderness. George Catlin, *Mouth of the Platte River, 900 Miles above St. Louis*, 1832. Catlin wrote of the area that is now Omaha, Nebraska: "The mouth of the Platte, is a beautiful scene, and no doubt will be the site of a large and flourishing town, soon after Indian titles shall have been extinguished to the lands in these regions. . . ." Though Catlin sought out the "wilder" tribes who lived farther up the Missouri River, the lower stretches of the Platte served as the aesthetic and political model of Indian Territory for most western travelers. Home to indigenous, nomadic, and immigrant groups, the area would eventually become the gateway for overland migrants to Colorado, the Oregon Territory, and California. (Courtesy of the National Museum of Art, Smithsonian Institution, gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison Jr.)

across some twenty or thirty "perfectly contented and happy" Shoshone encamped in an especially beautiful alpine valley. As Russell noted in his rambling prose, "I almost wished I could spend the rest of my days in a place like this where happiness and contentment seemed to reign in wild romantic splendor surrounded by majestic battlements which seemed to support the heavens and shut out all hostile intruders." A year later, he returned to the same valley and again could not refrain from commenting on the special qualities that seemed to infuse the idyllic lives of the Shoshone who lived there. Of all the places that Russell explored and trapped, none moved him as deeply as this "Secluded Valley," and the presence of the Shoshone as much as anything else made it a place time could "never efface from memory." If Russell could have visited this same valley later in the century, when it became part of Yellowstone National Park, he certainly would have recognized its scenery. The absence of the Shoshone would have marred its "wild

romantic splendor," however, and he probably would not have considered the area a wilderness at all.[37]

Few Americans had an opportunity to travel west in the first half of the nineteenth century, and they could experience the western wilds only vicariously through the writings of more fortunate travelers. Still more flocked to Catlin's exhibitions as they toured the East, admired popular lithographs based on his paintings and others' works, or read the novels of Cooper and the poetry of countless romantic poets. Nevertheless, an appreciation for the Indian wilderness was manifest in the local concerns of easterners of all social classes. In New Hampshire in 1853, for instance, five hundred working men and women petitioned the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company not to cut down a stately elm tree during the construction of an additional mill. It was "a beautiful and goodly tree," they proclaimed, belonging to the time "when the yell of the red man and the scream of the eagle were alone heard on the banks of the Merrimack." The tree "belonged" in Amoskeag, which could not be said of more "giant edifices filled with the buzz of busy and well remunerated machinery," and every day the workers looked on the giant elm they felt "a connecting link between the past and the present." The mill workers could not travel to the West, but they shared the romantic concern about its destruction and could not bear to have what little of the Indian wilderness that remained in their lives cut out from under them.[38]

The Idea of Wilderness at Midcentury

As Americans of various backgrounds expressed a growing concern about the price of industrial progress, many took comfort in the fact that some portions of the precolonial landscape remained undeveloped in the East. In particular, stretches of uncut forest in the Adirondack and Allegheny Mountains attracted a growing number of outdoor enthusiasts from the cities of the eastern seaboard. Nevertheless, a clear distinction was made between the western wilds and the "pristine" mountain districts of Pennsylvania, New York, New England, and North Carolina. As someone who knew all of these areas, Charles Lanman was able to make fine distinctions between "actual" wilderness and less "pure" forms of nature. An editor, librarian, essayist, and landscape painter, Lanman started his travels in the 1830s with a trip to Maine, and over the course of the next two decades he journeyed throughout northern Michigan, the Alleghenies, and the Adirondacks. A self-described "lover and defender of the Indian race," Lanman shared the sentiments of many other young adventurers and considered native peoples to be an integral part of the wilderness. In describing Sault Sainte Marie during a trip to the northern Great Lakes in 1846, for instance, he wrote that it lay "in the bosom of a mountainous land, where the red man yet reigns in his native freedom. Excepting an occasional picketed fort or trading house, it is yet a *perfect wilderness*."[39]

On a trip to the Adirondacks in 1853, however, Lanman provided a contrast to the "perfect wilderness" around Lake Superior. While touring Lake George in upstate New York, he noted how the western shore had long been converted into farmland while the eastern shore of the lake was "yet a comparative wilderness." It was the absence of Indians to the east of the lake, coupled with sparse settlements, that defined the area as a "comparative wilderness." While beautiful in its own right, such an area by no means left as profound an impact on Lanman as did Sault Sainte Marie. Farther north of Lake George, however, Lanman was deeply impressed with the "alpine wilderness" around Mount Marcy, though in a profoundly different way. Because the area had "long since been abandoned by the red man, the solitude of its deep valleys and lonely lakes for the most part [was] more impressive than that of the far-off Rocky Mountains." Though contrary to both Washington Irving and Osborne Russell's ideas about the Rockies, the almost unnatural solitude of the Adirondacks would ultimately become enshrined in the first national parks.[40]

Any discussion of antebellum ideas about wilderness must close with an examination of Henry David Thoreau's philosophy.[41] Scholars generally agree that Thoreau's ideas about wilderness crystallized during his two-year stay at Walden Pond, when he broke his sojourn there to visit the Maine woods in the spring of 1846. While in Maine, he attempted to climb Mount Katahdin, but dangerous weather conditions and lack of adequate provisions sent him scrambling down for safety. After failing twice to ascend the mountain, Thoreau was shocked by the awful indifference that wild nature apparently exhibited toward humans; far from a transcendental encounter, the raw Maine wilderness provided a nightmare in which "Titanic, inhuman Nature has got [man] at disadvantage, caught . . . alone, and pilfers him of some of his divine faculty. She does not smile on him as in the plains."[42]

Thoreau's experience on the broken granite face of Katahdin shook the foundations of his understanding of the natural world, but this traumatic episode also brought forth the basic elements of his own philosophy. Forced to question the meaning of existence at the most fundamental level, in the most fundamental language, Thoreau wrote: "What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries!—Think of our life in Nature,—dayly to be shown matter, to come in contact with it,—rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common sense! Contact! Contact! Who are we? where* are we?" Clearly, for Thoreau, the point of climbing Katahdin was not to find Emerson's "apparition of God" but to touch, taste, smell, and breathe nature itself. It was *"Contact!"* with primordial earth that allowed people to fully experience their humanity and not, as Emerson suggested, the relaxed contemplation of nature as if it were "a metaphor of the human mind."[43] Nevertheless, Thoreau did not leave Maine with a clear set of ideas, and it would take him several years to reconcile his dramatic experiences on Katahdin with his earlier wanderings in the fields and woods of eastern Massachusetts.

Some have argued that Thoreau's high estimation of Native Americans was considerably lessened by his trip to Maine. For Thoreau, the mountains in northern Maine seemed to be "a place for heathenism and superstitious rites—to be inhabited of men nearer of kin to the rocks and wild animals than we."[44] But it was