

Visual Analysis: John Gast's *American Progress*



1. Read the analysis by George Croffut that I have provided at the end of this assignment.
2. Divide the painting into four quadrants. Also view just the center figure.
 - a. In the left-hand column, write only what you **SEE**.
 - b. In the right-hand column, write descriptions of what you **FEEL**.

SEE	FEEL

3. With a partner, discuss the painting and its quadrants. Share and fill in with additional information.

4. Now, list or map the **Themes**, **Symbols**, and **Ideas** presented in the painting. Build on your prior knowledge (this painting was created in 1872).

5. How is the West depicted?

6. How is the East?

7. What about the South and North?

8. What are the contradictions?

9. Based on the painting, what does “progress” mean to the “people?”

10. How does *American Progress* include and exclude themes of the Greater Reconstruction? (you will find it after you read the page in the Link on my webpage titled: Humanities Before and After the Civil War)

11. What assumptions does the painting make?

12. Quickly read the information that history.net provides on the Sand Creek Massacre, Little Big Horn, and Nez Perce War (3 separate events; therefore 3 separate searches). Summarize the 2 incidents as well as the reasons for the encounters and the U.S. interventions in them. Explain how these two incidents reflects the United States’ vision of expansion over native rights.

13. How does the painting reflect Manifest Destiny?

Excerpts from explanatory text that George A. Croffut provided to market John Gast's 1872 lithograph *American Progress*.

This rich and wonderful country--the progress of which at the present time, is the wonder of the old world--was until recently, inhabited exclusively by the lurking savage and wild beasts of prey. If the rapid progress of the "Great West" has surprised our people, what will those of other countries think of the "Far West," which was destined at an early day, to be the vast granary [grain producing region], as it is now the treasure chamber of our country?...

In the foreground, the central and principal figure, a beautiful and charming Female, is floating westward through the air bearing on her forehead the "Star of Empire...." On the right of the picture is a city, steamships, manufactories, schools and churches over which beams of light are streaming and filling the air--indicative of civilization. The general tone of the picture on the left declares darkness, waste and confusion. From the city proceed the three great continental lines of railway.... Next to these are the transportation wagons, overland stage, hunters, gold seekers, pony express, pioneer emigrant and the

warrior dance of the "noble red man." Fleeing from "Progress"...are Indians, buffaloes, wild horses, bears, and other game, moving Westward, ever Westward, the Indians with their squaws, papooses, and "pony lodges," turn their despairing faces towards, as they flee the wondrous vision. The "Star" is *too much for them*.

...What home, from the miner's humble cabin to the stately marble mansion of the capitalist, should be without this Great National Picture, which illustrates in the most artistic manner all the gigantic results of American Brains and Hands! Who would not have such a beautiful token to remind them of the country's grandeur and enterprise which have caused the mighty wilderness to blossom like the rose!!!