

ABSTRACT

The Sublime and the Synthetic: Riparian Art and Industrialization

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This study proposes that traditional, American riparian artistry provided the greatest retaliation against the harsh environmental changes imposed by industry during the Gilded Age. Common environmental ethics and widespread social identification with nature established popular criteria that the American public used to determine the merits of industrialism. An eclectic mixture of local and national riparian artwork demonstrates the full influence of riparian aesthetics during the Gilded Age. Waco, Texas serves as the example of local artwork because of the city's central riparian location and Waco's cultural identification with the Brazos River. This thesis evaluates the extent of the natural, American sublime in direct contrast with the human synthetic to evaluate the connection between the natural and the material.

The Sublime and the Synthetic: Riparian Art and Industrialization

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“In the beginning all the world was America.”

John Locke

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the United States of America arrived on the international scene unsure of its cultural identity. After a successful revolution, Americans possessed political independence and sovereign autonomy, but struggled to create an equally authentic American culture separated from European influence. Numerous young American artists responded to the call by using methods removed from the principles of European intellectualism—methods that highlighted the differences between the young republic and the dogmatic artistry and literature of industrial Europe. Many American artists considered American waterways among the most worthy subjects for early identification in American nationalism because of the untarnished elements associated with many North American rivers. Further, as the nineteenth century progressed, illustrious American waterways represented the best solution to alleviate the ugly, synthetic-grey created by the Industrial Revolution. Progressive commercial developers managed and placed industrial zones adjacent to the rich American waterways that indirectly provided synthetic complements to the natural scenery. Socially, many contemporaries believed that the pure sublimity of the water cleansed the area of industrial byproducts and toady scenery. Artistically, nature and pristine waterways

provided the greatest means for severing America from the shackles of European arts.¹ Riparian zones presented the best means to complement the new industrial visions of the sublime created by urban development through including various traditional American values of the natural sublime coexisting with the new industrial sublime. This study evaluates public perception of American riparian zones during the Gilded Age and explores the significance of riparian art as a focal point in countering industrialism.

Methodology

Industrial scenery did not always represent the visual desires and interest of the general American public. Factories bellowed smoke and contaminated adjacent ecosystems causing many Americans to question the true value of the new commercial progressivism. Simultaneously, rivers, a natural source of aesthetic beauty in artistry and public opinion, represented purity, danger, power, and life to many American settlers seeking sustainable development. Sustainable development required industry to provide for basic human needs, but humans also required the natural compound of water for existence. Progressive reasoning concluded that the beautiful American waterways represented the best means of counteracting the negative aesthetics of industrial slums.

This study uses national artistry and local pictures to determine the effective results of popular imagery during the Gilded Age in combating the grotesque imagery created by the industrial revolution. This thesis includes discussions on the artistic approach of national artists, who sought national/international recognition, with local, Wacoan photographers, who sought local acceptance with private sellers. These two

¹Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 6-7.

artistic styles demonstrate how American art compensated for industrialization at both a local and national level.

Waco, Texas represents a combination of a Southern and Southwestern city that rests on the banks of the Brazos River. Numerous early photographs exist locally that depict the developments and changes along the river. Local photographs selected for the study represent vivid, properly dated, and topical images captured by professionals. The local photographs include the Brazos/Bosque Rivers at various stages, several large bridges in downtown Waco, and lush vegetation along the river banks. The study attempted to use only photographs captured by professional photographers and not amateurs—each photo used in this thesis is believed to be a professional image.

This study addresses several questions:

1. How do national paintings/photographs compare with the depictions of the Brazos River?
2. Do the natural aesthetics presented by American waterways represent the best means for combating the grey portrait of industry?
3. What do these national and local art pieces imply about the development and perceptions of recreation, industry, and commerce along American riparian zones?

Photographs referenced in Part II of this study represent recreation, crossings and fording locations, safe railroad bridges, dangerous railroad bridges, safe suspension bridges, dangerous suspension bridges, safe traditional bridges, dangerous traditional bridges, and vast views of riparian locations from high perspectives. This study addresses national images before local images because the process appears to provide a cleaner transition from one subject to another—leaving the local image as the most recent in the reader’s mind before the concluding comparisons.

Bridges represent one of the key aspects to understanding commercial development during the Gilded Age because bridges represent commercialism in nature. Often, bridges represent safe passage over otherwise problematic locations. In this study, bridges represent the presence of industrial growth, large human populations, and respect for nature by providing a means of transportation that does not involve tainting a water supply by frequently fording animals across drinking holes.

This study bases the criteria for artistic analysis on the weather, artists' vantage point, river currents, river banks, river levels, bridges, social stature of humans included, transportation, and artistic focal points. The objective of the criteria remains determining various environmental ethics and simplistic art techniques associated with the content of each image in this study. Environmental ethics of the Gilded Age can be best be demonstrated via artistry by analyzing paintings and photographs associated with the age and subjects included in the image. Obviously, any professional photographer would have only included objects in the artistic images that he or she believed to be the most valuable. This study bases its observations and assumptions on the fact that artists do not illustrate places, people, or events that held no personal importance. Most ethics associated with this view of the American sublime pertain to a general acceptance that all waterways represent beauty when left uncontaminated by human interference.

This research compares national artwork with local artwork in an effort to determine the cultural impact of the pieces. Further, this study includes historical analysis by analyzing the subjects of the artistic depictions and evaluating the definition of the American sublime as the meaning evolved during the Gilded Age to represent a completely new facet of sublimity that included industry. This study bases all analysis on

historical components that provide insight into the perceptions of artistry during the Gilded Age.

The Waco photographs originated from the holdings of the Texas Collection at Baylor University because that archive contains the largest local selection available to the public, holding a rich collection of numerous depictions captured by professional Waco photographers. The images also represent the best efforts of various photographers to capture the river, or recreation on the river, as the focal point of the photograph.

This study selected the various national images from two primary locations—the Amon Carter Museum and the Smithsonian American Art Museum. The Amon Carter Museum represents one of the greatest collections in artwork pertaining to the American West, while the Smithsonian American Art Museum represents an eclectic group of images pertaining to Americana. Both facilities provide an excellent source of relevant material that enriches research on any subject pertaining to artwork and iconology. This work includes all of the images discussed in the text in the appendix to avoid copyright infringement.

CHAPTER TWO

Contextual Overview of American Culture

The Importance of Water

While exploring the American West, early explorers recorded detailed accounts of exotic flora and fauna that indicated a plethora of unyielding resources in previously-unexplored American waterways. These reports created excitement for eager pioneers and any clean freshwater became a primary target for settlers because of its crucial role in civic development. Scholars who study the development of the American West/wilderness agree that “all [things] begin with water.”² The amount and availability of clean freshwater determine the size and speed of human civilization in undeveloped regions. The importance of clean freshwater remains of utmost importance today as it did centuries ago and will, well into the future.

In many locations, capitalists buy, process, and sell water as a private commodity because all humans require the presence of water to survive. The controlling of water represents true power—controlling the development of populations, commerce, industries, and agriculture.³ For the traditional Marxist, water represents the major commodity for extracting all natural resources from a geographical location and the

²Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1985), 15.

³Ellen Manchester, *Arid Waters: Photographs from the Water in the West Project* (Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 1992), 1.

accumulation of natural wealth.⁴ The extraction process requires water for sustainable development for the workers, resources for mills/factories, and for purification systems. In Europe, the limited availability of fresh water forced Europeans to conserve and modify waterways—sometimes compromising the aesthetics of the riparian location for secured amounts of the essential resource. But, North America, wealthy in wilderness environments, provided opportunities for the opposite of European waterways, because freshwater abundance did not require that Americans exploit every drop of water available in nature. The availability of these resources provided Americans with a plethora of capital and limited workers to extract the various minerals from the wilderness.

The immense presence of rich riparian locations became a focal subject of American culture and identity. Artists began to interpret these riparian locations as an essential element in American artistic identification because each river bolstered the social acceptance that America represented unending, wild, and untainted nature. Politically, socially, and artistically, the depictions of American freshwater represented power to the world. The abundance of water in America demonstrated one of the most crucial roles in the international development of the young republic during the early years. The riparian zones proclaimed to the world that North American waterways demonstrated the potential to support a larger population and industrial development than in Europe—a concept that slowly led to the increase of confidence in the young American social model.⁵

⁴Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, 25.

⁵*Ibid.*, 48.

The presence of water in the American West fostered the gradual development of scientists, engineers, economists, and bureaucrats who each concluded that irrigation would provide the Americans with the ability to inhabit every square mile of the arid land. Initially, pioneers viewed the rugged American West as “the land that God forgot” because of its aridity and desert-like geographic features.⁶ In North America, the perception of development tethered to the concept that that pioneer settlements only occurred where the environment proved profitable. Water provided development for primitive mining and rock sifting in industrial realms, and simultaneously provided irrigation waters for farming previously neglected geographical locations.⁷

However, the most important cultural aspect involving western rivers remained the methods of perceiving riparian uses and development. All people of the world require water to survive, but American water represented the presence of untainted water and raw beauty. Immigrants poured into American borders, hoping to acquire a homestead on a beautiful riparian zone. The sublimity of the precious resource, water, made artistic images appear picturesque because of their potential for sustainable development. American river ways caused a shift in traditional, artistic interpretations of nature and slowly began to provide the emerging republic with a natural resource that Europe envied—raw aesthetics.

⁶William E. Smythe, *The Conquest of Arid America* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1905), 327.

⁷Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, 58, 103-9.

American Perceptions of Rivers and Nature

Ironically, the artistic emphasis on nature originated in Europe during the late eighteenth century and spread to the United States during the 1820s and 1830s. The primary difference represented in the two differing art forms presented itself via potential artistic locations and subjects. Generally, European landscape artists created fictitious locations and depicted central objects with manipulated details. For example, the European artist accurately depicted the central waterway acting as the focal image but created picturesque details mimicking a perfected, fictitious landscape. But, artists in America discovered locations true to the picturesque ideals sought by European artists authentic in necessary content. Culturally, the Americans held the advantage by remaining true to the actual imagery and not mimicking the sublime on canvas.⁸ The aesthetics North America provided served a means for developing cultural identity in a form in which most European masters only imagined.

Popular politics of the 1830s rallied support for the development of rail systems, canals, turnpikes, and the development of farmland west of the Appalachian Mountains. Many Americans viewed the rails, turnpikes, and canals with high optimism because each provided a better means of transportation into the majestic nature of America. Initially, water routes acted as the primary medium for transporting goods into the lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. After several decades, transportation developments created easy access for common individuals to engage in moderate tourism during the early and mid nineteenth century without having to travel at sea and up the Mississippi River.⁹

⁸John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourism Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3.

⁹*Ibid.*, 3-4.

New methods involving trains, turnpikes, The National Road, and the Erie Canal increased diversification in the processes that Americans traveled west. But, each new method of transportation also increased Euro-American settlement into the back country and increased the destruction of the natural environments because of various ingredients each new transportation method required. As new forms of transport developed, the destruction of the artistic, pristine wilderness increased, but these developments did not hinder tourism—the aesthetics remained in place in the eyes of the visitors. Many visitors to the American West did not realize that the development of civilization destroyed the ecosystem because they had not witnessed the locations before commercial development.

Tourism developed as a result of contemporary principles of the day: spirituality, cultural/artistic uniqueness, and raw natural wonder. For many travelers, the view of the American landscape depicted the holy text of Judeo-Christian beliefs that revealed themselves through personally viewing the natural landscapes.¹⁰ Many Europeans believed that God destined their race for America by providing the United States of America with the ability to win its independence, acquire land, and successfully defeat the native, savage peoples with relative ease. Further, America demonstrated the power and awe of God's creation for these Europeans and only added to the development of cultural identity—America represented God's chosen land for his newly chosen people. The new, lush environment influenced Europeans to view nature as an extension of

¹⁰Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 7.

Judeo-Christian principles. One historian, Smythe, wrote: “Men learned from the environment a better way to pray.”¹¹

Another shift in academia began to promote principles stating that nature promoted individuality that drifted from industrialization and towards nature because nature created a means of undergoing a true religious experience through interacting with God’s creation.¹² Painters represented some of God’s blessed who possessed the ability to interpret sublimity in creation and translate the images to canvas in a method that demonstrated a similar effect on a viewer, as if the present at the viewpoint—a process that allowed the entire world to experience the awe of God’s American creation without venturing to deep, remote locations.¹³

Unfortunately, landscape artistry reached its pinnacle during the primal stages of industrial development of America (late 19th Century). In many cases, as painters like Thomas Cole and Frederic Church painted the epic landscapes of the American rivers, commercialization began to creep into the valleys and instigate a slow, permanent process of extracting various natural resources from the earth.¹⁴ The shift in commercial use of the once-raw riparian zones of the American West eventually led to the artistic inclusion of industrial centers in art and literature toward the mid and late 19th century. As the industrial emphasis matured, many American artists dealt with the commercial shift by focusing artwork on industrial centers in aesthetic coexistence with riparian zones.

¹¹Smythe, *The Conquest of Arid America*, 328.

¹²Sears, *Sacred Places*, 5-6.

¹³Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 7.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 5.

But commercial development into the raw area remained relatively slow.

Tourism continued to grow in the western portions of America because of American writers, such as Mark Twain, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Washington Irving. These writers assisted in creating an American style of literature that complemented the American style of visual art and completed the development of a uniquely American fine arts culture.¹⁵ Other great American writers, such as James F. Cooper, claimed that many European river ways filled with poverty and urban slums. Cooper believed it was no great irony that these images remained absent from many European, riparian artwork because it would only further tarnish the image of the European waterway—European artwork required fictitious landscapes to remain in competition with American landscape artistry. Cooper believed that some places in America (large cities) had begun the transition from a wild waterway toward an industrial zone, but the primary images and depictions of industrial slums and poverty remained the most prevalent in a European context.¹⁶

The global perception involving the role of nature evolved into the belief that the extreme aesthetics of the western regions in the United States represented proof that the sublime of all God's creation existed in North America. The general perception of pristine nature emerged as the primary method of cultural identification in America and each riparian landscape painting only further solidified the amazing beauty that European nations began to envy. Political leaders interpreted aesthetics and raw land as power in

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶James Fennimore Cooper, "American and European Scenery Compared," H. Barbara Weinberg, *The Art Experience in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (New York City: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1976), 1-4.

the form of resources and each image reflected the reserved power of the American wilderness.¹⁷

Visitors to various American natural wonders often demonstrated their primary motivations for visiting remote locations as recreation and relaxation. Over time, the belief that nature cleansed the soul of impurities grew to popular belief and produced the eventual rise in natural recreation patterns—traveling into nature itself became accepted relaxation. European recreation and tourism commonly revolved around venturing to ancient buildings constructed by humans rich in ancient history. America, instead, cornered the market on natural tourism and portrayed the pristine image of the world in its existence before human developments.¹⁸ Many Europeans believed that earlier indigenous peoples of North America lacked the mental capability to capitalize on the rich environment and this assumed belief in Euro-American superiority explained how many of the native populations lost control of the American West because of incompetence while exploiting natural resources. Instead, the power, resources, and exploits of the natural beauty rightfully belonged to the conquering Euro-American victors.

Euro-Americans began a steady migration west and each riparian location served as the essential means in developing mills, fishing, mining, and settlements. In one early American example of development, settlers identified extremely high deposits of iron ore near the Hudson and Housatonic Rivers providing settlers with the ability to industrialize

¹⁷John Wilmerding, *American Views: Essays on American Art* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 51.

¹⁸Nancy Goldberger and Andrea Scott (ed.), *Art and the River: Views and Visions of the Housatonic* (Great Barrington, Massachusetts: Sheffield Art League, 2004), 29.

remote locations relatively easy. In other cases, large stone deposits provided the foundation for quarries and building strong homes for settlers—only further exploiting the resourceful aesthetics that attracted development in the area. However, in rare instances, some of these villages served as art colonies that used the settled area to house artists who painted and recorded the landscape, which only promoted the area's beauty further.¹⁹

The concluding perception of nature demonstrates one of paradox—managing and developing the land required the growth of an industrial and commercial identity. But, the commercialization of this property also represents the destruction of the same resource and aesthetic wonders that granted America its own sense of place in the world.²⁰ The perception of nature demonstrates the ironic plight of America—preserve the natural wonder endowed by God, but continue extracting resources in a method that, hopefully, will not damage the powerful aesthetic landscape.

Concepts in Artistic Painting and Photography

Traditional European artistic models remained the initial precedent when America began to culturally develop. Most paintings involved one (or more) of three major themes: religion, independence, or 18th century republicanism.²¹ American artists initially attempted to compete with the masters of Europe by engaging in large dramatic paintings of either historical or biblical events. In 1825, American landscape depictions only represented 10% of all American artwork, but exponentially boomed to 90% by

¹⁹Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 56.

²⁰Miller, *The Empire of the Eye*, 18-19.

²¹*Ibid.*, 58.

1850.²² By 1850, the concept of landscape painting began to engulf European methods of painting, as well, producing some American-imitation artwork in Europe.

Landscape painting required several steps during its initial stages of development during 1820-1830s: sketch the primary image on a pad, notate unique geographical features, sketch the prototype on canvas, and apply paint in a studio (in the case of large paintings that the artist could not transport). In some instances, landscape views took the form of aerial images outlining town streets and roads, serving as a map, but such instances remained relatively uncommon.²³ Other differences in painting methods varied according to the artists' choice to paint in studio or on location. In most cases, the artist determined the size of the canvas he or she used after viewing the site and determining the method he or she believed best depicted the scene. Artists, such as Albert Bierstadt, believed that large paintings depicted grandeur, but the actual truth of that belief remained vested in the viewer's opinion. Some viewers expressed intimidation when viewing the epically proportioned art and believed that the girth of such paintings distracted a realistic impression from the landscape; though the artist normally painted grand-scale paintings to indicate the correct size ratios, as if the viewer physically stood at the actual scene. Near the end of the American landscape era, most interpretations of natural images resulted in awesome displays that spanned entire walls.²⁴

²²*New World, Creating an American Art* (Hamburg, Germany: Bucerius Kunst Forum, 2007), 67.

²³Tim Barringer and Andrew Wilton, *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820-1880* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 19-27.

²⁴Wilmerding, *American Views*, 61.

Other artists used techniques involving light and water to represent “spiritual transmutation.”²⁵ The process helped viewers bond with the painting by showing the majestic power of the light on a specific surface or entity in the work. The light refracted off water and indicated a sense of cleansing. Traditionally, humans associated water with cleanliness and spirituality because water acts as one of the primary necessities of life. Rivers depicted in the wilderness commonly provided an overtone of rugged individualism by displaying the required element for commercial development.²⁶ In other contexts, rivers represent other implied meanings that most viewers commonly miss with only a quick glance at a piece. Traditionally, an open river reflects serenity and promise by depicting still, quiet waters and indicating a smooth voyage. At other times, American rivers represent the tradition view of individualism through “lines of energy—for self-discovery and self-definition.”²⁷

Some original American landscape artists, such as Thomas Cole, preferred using a method known as *motion art* that depicted the location at different stages in time. The process offered timely comparison between two eras in history and recorded the perception of human development.²⁸ Cole also used an artistic method that depicted the river subject in the form of an *S* shape in his paintings—forcing the viewer to follow his line of focus throughout the entire painting.²⁹

²⁵Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 41.

²⁶William C. Agee and Susan C. Faxon, *Coming of Age: American Art, 1850s to 1950* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006), 7-9.

²⁷Wilmerding, *American Views*, 61-68.

²⁸Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 23-4.

²⁹Wilmerding, *American Views*, 56.

American landscape artistry required painters to execute each stroke with great accuracy and detail. Several botanists used a painting by Albert Bierstadt to catalog the vegetation depicted in his paintings and included descriptions in traveling catalogs on the depicted region.³⁰ By the mid 19th century, landscape artists demonstrated such skill and perfection that those paintings defined American landscape with competent accuracy. But, soon artists experienced a new pressure in the struggle to demonstrate accurate details when technology introduced something unexpected—the photograph.

The photograph burst into the American mainstream about the time of the American Civil War. Photographic technology allowed artists the luxury of quickly recording an image he or she considered painting instead of requiring a day to sketch the image in a book. The photograph provided detailed recordings of locations exactly as the images appeared to the human eye—eliminating the need for artistic interpretation of places and things. The photograph required less time, effort, and skill than a painting, and proved a more-accurate device for surveying and recording places at specific times, creating a problem for the school of landscape artistry.

In general, the American public exhibited an opinion of exhaustion regarding the fragile status of the American South following the Civil War. Much of the American public desired a shift in public attitude away from the depressing status of the South, focusing instead on developmental promises of the American West. The American public desired a new national identity that revived the traditional spirit of American culture and sought a new identity west of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers near the

³⁰Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 49.

Rocky Mountains.³¹ As a response to the new surge in western culture, the United States government commissioned massive expeditions to survey, notate, record, and assess the lands of the American West to determine probable locations for commercial development. Each survey focused on a different aspect of the West—some aesthetics and water, others terrain and potential mineral deposits. Railroad lines also discovered the many uses of survey information and began commissioning private expeditions that surveyed remote locations in the American West to serve as potential railroad locations.³² Worldwide, magazines and annual reports published numerous photographs of the West, depicting the region as a vast resource that held wealth for all who migrated to the featured locations.

Other developments in photography referenced the business market and the private sector of investments. In early photography, the primary object of expression (object in the center of the picture) usually represented the focal object of the photographer.³³ Photographers often returned to the same locations and captured the same images years later at a record of change. Over time, private commercial developers discovered the use for photographs (even currently) in comparing various community developments over time and tracing the gradual evolution of commerce. Wealthy businessmen and investors used/use photographs to propose new industrial locations,

³¹Manchester, *Arid Water*, 5.

³²*Ibid.*, 5.

³³Inge Bondi, "Some Relationships between Photography and Artists," *Archives of the American Art Journal* (1969), 1.

determine progress reports, and suggest areas that can potentially increase production/development.³⁴

European photographers began taking photographs of riparian zones in Europe, imitating the importance of nature in America. Some European pictures also included ancient ruins of stone covered in vegetation in an effort at intertwining nature and archaic human settlements. The concept involving photography of ruins spread to some American West photographers, such as A.C. Vroman, who photographed the ruins of missions during his travels in the American West.³⁵ The predominant struggle to define new European artistry in response to the American system appeared to blend between a combination of industrial development and picturesque nature—two points on a line at either end of the progressive benchmarks of the era.³⁶ Further, the photograph represented a new art medium that lacked historical experience and artists, worldwide, had not yet defined the photograph's specific niche in the arts.

The greatest concept of photography involved the gradual development of rivalry between artists and photographers. Photography remained only available in black and white, but demonstrated a perfect visual of target objects (rivers, valleys, etc.). As time progressed, painters became more attentive to detail and began to lose justifications for inaccurate details in return for exaggerated aesthetics. An artist needed to record a valley accurately because photographs provided records that demonstrated any unclear images

³⁴Manchester, *Arid Water*, 10-11.

³⁵Ruth I. Mahood, *Photographer of the Southwest: Adam Clark Vroman, 1856-1916* (Los Angeles, California: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1974), 57-60.

³⁶Mattie Boom and Hans Rooseboom, *A New Art Photography in the 19th Century: The Photo Collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam: Snoek-Ducaju & Zoon, 1996), 66-67.

drawn by hand. During the mid-19th century, general artistry began shifting from the accurate portrayal of geographical features, toward a theme depicting historical events, features and customs related to national identity.³⁷ Photographs might be able to capture an image with perfect details, but lost the personal gusto of a colorful canvas art piece.³⁸ Artists slowly began to paint fictional locations to depict specific American concepts (individualism, resources, etc.) rallying public awareness on American nationalism—any necessity for recording trivial detail remained the task of photographers.³⁹

Near the conclusion of the nineteenth century, photographers slowly began to depict the American West including the development of industry and, what contemporaries referenced to as, *progress*. These new interpretations of photography broadened the definition of photographic artwork that varied according to the focal image, the method used, the polarization, and the photographer's printing process.⁴⁰ Later pictures depicted the shift from aesthetics toward industrialization in an effort to depict the new age of progressive power through machinery. Images of commercial locations and metropolitan areas evolved as the great center pieces of artistry—as did the slums and depictions of poverty.

After the 1890s, affordable cameras became available to many private citizens. These cameras and photographs created a small resurgence in aesthetic pictures when

³⁷Agee, *Coming of Age*, 25-26.

³⁸Wolfgang M. Freitag, "Early Uses of Photography in the History of Art," *Art Journal* (Winter 1979-1980), 122.

³⁹Agee, *Coming of Age*, 25-26.

⁴⁰Phillipe Ortel, "Poetry, the picturesque and the photogenic quality of the nineteenth century," *Journal of European Studies* (2000), 19.

numerous individuals vacationed and packed a Kodak No. 1 for documentation.⁴¹ Most Americans, during the mid-nineteenth century became accustomed to venturing to a photographer's studio to experience the marvels of the invention. Over time, industrial development modified the outdoor American experience to include urban centers. But, photography maintained a healthy balance of both industry and riparian locations as an experimentation that returned society to the early republican roots of Americana—returning to locations that the earlier-American public loved.⁴²

The Concept of the Sublime

Artistry in America revolved around a concept known by many as the *sublime*. The *sublime* refers to the apex of whatever subject an individual observes. The concept of the sublime dominated American national identity for several decades because the images of the American landscape presented formerly unknown images to many people of the world. Most images of American riparian-landscape exemplified riparian aesthetics and impressed many people, worldwide, who claimed that America represented the Earth's natural riparian sublime.⁴³ Officially, the effect of the sublime represents an effective emotional response (joy/ecstasy) to authority, power, or beauty.⁴⁴

Scientists and philosophers debated the issue of the American sublime and determined that natural phenomenon creates a sense of awe in an individual, which, in

⁴¹Peter Galassi, *American Photography 1890-1965: From the Museum of Modern Art New York* (New York City: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 13.

⁴²James D. Horan, *Mathew Brady: Historian with a Camera* (New York City: Bonanza Books, 1955), 10-12.

⁴³Barringer, *American Sublime*, 11.

⁴⁴Mary Arensberg, *The American Sublime* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1986).

turn, creates the basis for determining the parameters of the sublime. The sublime represents the apex of development because it inspires viewers with the greatest sense of awe believed possible. Later interpretations of the sublime redefined the pinnacle of a subject according to the preferential opinions of human beings—classifications of places according to recreation and aesthetics, but not industrial progress.⁴⁵ Several other lesser concepts involving the dynamical sublime originated from a Kantian method consisting of the physical object and human interpretation/interaction with the object. The effect of the grand aesthetic only existed in the mind of the beholder and, therefore, the true sublime remained relative to who viewed the location.⁴⁶

The concept of the riparian sublime varied for many American artists. Artists retained the ability to modify and manipulate the sublime by using light, color, and details—causing the viewer to experience a sense of wonder focused on the artist's depicted subject/subjects. Often, the pursuit of the riparian sublime motivated many artists to use larger paintings for both grandeur and to overwhelm the viewer. Several transcendentalists, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, believed that the key to determining the artistic sublime rested in the interpretations of light and color in nature. Light represents spirituality and draws focus to the sublimity of the objects, therefore, even unattractive items appear beautiful when submerged in light. Emerson believed that light produces the illusion that each part of the object occurred according to a specific reason

⁴⁵Barringer, *American Sublime*, 13.

⁴⁶Arensberg, *The American Sublime*, 5.

and the light provides the viewer with the opportunity to notice the perfections immediately.⁴⁷

The sublime, in general, represents a period of experience when humans encounter an overwhelming emotional pull of natural energies. Adventurers risked fatigue, death, starvation, and raids to experience what became known as the riparian sublime—mountain and valley paradises unknown to others people around the world.⁴⁸ Philosophers and scientists determined that American culture absorbed the riparian sublime in spiritual, national, and individual morals to justify hostile conquests of the American West from pre-existing indigenous peoples. Europeans believed that only they held the opportunity to preserve the riparian sublimity of God's sublime creation and that only Euro-Americans held the right to control the American West.

⁴⁷Barringer, *American Sublime*, 16-26.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 35, 37, 38.

CHAPTER THREE

Local Application and Image Interpretation

Wacoan Perceptions of the Brazos River

While the nation boomed with growth, technology, and progress, residents of Waco, Texas developed the banks of the Brazos River for industry and commerce. The greatest hindrance in development emerged in the form of the Brazos River's unstable currents and unpredictable flooding. From the beginning of Euro-American settlement, many locals did not view the Brazos River with the same finesse designated to Western waterways by nationally-renowned artists because of the Brazos' constant flooding threat. Permanent settlers found the land fertile, but also experienced crop destruction over time because of constant environmental instability. Local views of the Brazos River present a paradox—the river granted the stability of development but also removed the stability of permanent environmental fixation for commercial development.

Other artistic perception using the Brazos (and Bosque) River focused on the development of technology. Predominantly, early photographs depicting the Brazos River by focus on the bridges that spanned the river and, on occasion, catastrophic floods that damaged the adjacent areas. In each instance, the bridges represent the presence of industrial development in Waco and the realization of problems caused by commercial development and mass transportation. The inclusion of the bridges in artistic depictions creates a new synthesis of the aesthetic—one incorporating industry and commercial development in a similar form to the previous emphasis on specifically landscape artistry.

This study includes one depiction of the Bosque River as a means of aesthetics, with the majority focusing on the Brazos River section of downtown Waco, Texas. Most of the Brazos River images depict natural disasters and architectural developments spanning the river. This study divides the images into a combination of both peaceful and dangerous perceptions of the Brazos River. Photographers captured the images depicting the Bosque River within one mile of the Bosque River's merging with the Brazos River, therefore, the study includes the photograph because of close proximity and topical value.

Artwork of the Brazos in Comparison with National Artwork

Recreation

In 1894, William Merritt Chase completed a painting, *Idle Hours*, (Figure 1) depicting two women and two girls lazily resting on a dune line.⁴⁹ The image represents a slight impressionist motif with blurred human faces and bright parasols. The remainder of the beach appears relatively deserted, and the central focus of the image coexists between the females and the cape. Other supplemental focus pivots around the lush vegetation and rich growth in the sands. The image depicts a calm, warm day on the shore—relaxing at a picnic.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Fred Gildersleeve documented Waco residents enjoying recreational activities in Cameron Park (Figure 2).⁵⁰ Men, women and children, each dressed in his or her Sunday finest and then engaged in discussions,

⁴⁹William Merritt Chase, *Idle Hours*, oil painting on canvas, 1894, The Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

⁵⁰Fred Gildersleeve, *Gathering at the Bottoms*, Cameron Park Photographs, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

playground activities, picnics, and other various activities on a pleasant day in Cameron Park. The sparse vegetation and clothing styles indicate to the viewer the cool status of the weather. The photograph records festivities and fun as people enjoy a day in nature and away from their homes.

These images both represent similar settings. *Idle Hours* and *Gathering at the Bottoms* both portray a society consisting of fine-tailored apparel and moderate financial stature. The observation concludes that many areas adjacent to riparian zones presented excellent locations for middle-class socials and picnics. Viewers also decipher that activities occurred during both warmer and cooler months. In this instance, the Brazos riparian zone represents the national trend, according to these images, by serving as a strong foundation for playing, enjoyment, and social mingling. Both national and local artists also recorded recreation along rivers to demonstrate the value of leisure time adjacent to natural beauty—the river enhances recreational quality. Recreation presents the first aspect of use and artistic interpretation along the Brazos River.

Crossing/Fording

The works of Thomas Moran mostly tether to various cultural understandings of river crossings and the American West. Moran's painting, *Cliffs of the Green River*, (Figure 3) depicts a beautiful scene riddled with romantic imagery portraying the American West.⁵¹ A lone rider leads a clustered expedition over the shallow river basin toward a sparsely vegetated river bank of shrubs and short trees. Rock formations tower over the valley like great titans epically belittling all who cross the shallows. The piece

⁵¹Thomas Moran, *Cliffs of the Green River*, oil on canvas, 1874, The Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

demonstrates the romantic imagery of river crossings—while avoiding the expression of danger from the currents. The crossing focuses more attention on the raw aesthetics of the scene than on the dangerous possibilities of the river current.

This study examines another nationally-rooted, artistic piece of interest depicting crossings in an image by Ernest C. Peixotto titled *Washington Crossing*, (Figure 4) in 1897.⁵² The image portrays a bridge and two canoes resting on a sandy shore landing. The opposite shoreline remains clearly visible and displays a lush shoreline filled with large trees and shrubs. The waters appear to be deep, tranquil, and calm. Overall, the crossing remains wide, but does not appear to be fordable on foot because of deep waters. The height of the bridge, unlike that of the Green River portrayal by Moran, alludes to a strong river that reserves the possibility of becoming a dangerous location during a flood.

Local residents along the Brazos River, portrayed their riparian locations in similar methods. One image presents the Brazos River in a setting shallow enough to for people to safely cross without peril, while trees transition the river bank into a dense jungle-thicket (Figure 5).⁵³ The rocky shoals provide excellent crossing, vantage, and recreation points for travelers. The image represents one of the few that does not display a bridge in the back ground. Much like Moran's *Cliffs of the Green River*, crossing the Brazos at the photographed location appears safe, the season appears warm, and rich with natural resources.

⁵²Ernest C. Peixotto, *Washington Crossing*, ink and ink wash, 1897, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

⁵³*Low Brazos River*, The Brazos River Photographs, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Another local Brazos depiction focuses on several men and horses crossing the Brazos River using a ferry boat (Figure 6).⁵⁴ The photo depicts a relatively mediocre image-quality, but the subject remains magnificent. The picture demonstrates early progress in the area—not having to ford the river in a shallow location. The boat appears complex, with a sled-like construction capable of carrying a covered wagon and two-horse team. Viewers spot five individuals (possibly six) on the small boat, each facing the approaching shore. The banks appear moderately sloped and the landing lush with grasses and shrubs. The Brazos, flowing calmly in the foreground, appears placid to onlookers. This piece represents an excellent complement to Peixotto's *Washington Crossing*. Both demonstrate tranquil waters, boats in the water, fair weather, safe locations, and lush banks. But, the photograph on the Brazos differs by depicting commerce crossing the waters.

American culture commonly views river crossings as dangerous locations when tragedy can strike at any moment. A rapid change in currents, sudden rise in water, or hostile creature in the water creates a problem in a moment's glance. In these four depictions, the rivers appear harmless and majestic, beautiful and passive. Local art depicts an aspect of development that includes transporting goods and people safely on a ferry—something the other images neglect. In all cases, the artwork displays a crossing as an event to be respected and never underestimated—but with river crossings acting as an act of beauty and sublime experience.

⁵⁴*Ferry Boat on the Brazos River*, Brazos River Photographs, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Railroad Bridges

In 1885, Charles Roscoe Savage photographed a train crossing a high bridge over the Dale Creek. Savage's photograph, *Dale Creek Bridge*, (Figure 7) depicts progress at its best.⁵⁵ Commerce and industry safely cross over an area that once required immense effort and care to cross. The bridge represents safety, progress, and technological innovation. Jagged rocks and a small (possibly dry) riparian zone cross the ravine. The vegetation appears either dry or dormant as the canyon wind through the rugged earth. *The Dale Creek Bridge*, depicts a treacherous riparian zone requiring a unique approach to determine the best means to function.

The next image represents a less-assured trip on a rail line bridge—*Danger Ahead*. Winslow Homer's, *Danger Ahead*, (Figure 8) depicts two men nervously reacting to a turn on an almost submerged trestle.⁵⁶ From the caboose, one man looks ahead into the evening toward the headlight of the locomotive, while the other begins painstakingly turning the brake wheel on the train. Silhouettes illuminate the train car windows behind the focal characters as water rips past the wooden bolsters under the train. The danger remains unknown to the viewer because a bend in the railroad makes clear visibility impossible. The night appears clear, but the men sport warm apparel, indicating the likelihood of a cooler season. The image represents, as its name implies—danger, tension, and fear of the bend in the rails.

Several local pictures compliment these images with finesse. An image of the two rail line bridges over the Brazos River indicates a safe passage because of the

⁵⁵Charles Roscoe Savage, *Dale Creek Bridge*, albumen print on paper mounted on paper, 1885, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁶Winslow Homer, *Danger Ahead: from Appeltons' Journal of Literature, Science, and Art*, wood engraving on paper, 1870, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

tranquility of the banks and flow.⁵⁷ The bridge appears to stand a fair distance from the surface of the river, indicating its relative strength, safe passage during flooding, and support. The banks depict lush vegetation and temperate weather from the fullness of the river banks.

Railroad Bridges facing South, (Figure 9) compares well to the photograph depicting the train crossing the Dale Creek. Each picture demonstrates the safe passage over a traditionally treacherous terrain. Each of the images provides insight into the importance of rail transportation and commerce during the era—maintaining a level road for the railroad to follow. The photographs depict the importance of industrial progress and desire of humans to control their environments.

The second local picture depicts the same Brazos River rail bridges, but during a flood stage, *1908 Brazos Flood – Rail Bridges* (Figure 11).⁵⁸ In 1908, the Brazos River rose and flooded much of east Waco (Figure 10)⁵⁹. The photograph, taken on Elm Street, *1908 Brazos Flood – Elm Street* (photographer's back to the river), articulate the devastation the 1908 flood caused. The flood raised the Brazos River to a flood stage of 38 feet, 8 inches—the worst flood up to that time. The photograph depicting the rail bridge in 1908 (Figure 11), also demonstrates the threat of the rising Brazos River and the

⁵⁷*Railroad Bridges, facing South*, Brazos River Photographs, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

⁵⁸“Flood Waters Tear Through the City,” *The Waco Times-Herald*, 3 December 1913; *1908 Brazos Flood – Rail Bridges*, 1908 Brazos River Flood, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 1908.

⁵⁹*1908 Flood of the Brazos – Elm Street*, 1908 Brazos River Flood, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 1908.

danger the waters caused.⁶⁰ Water splashes over the support braces and the bottom rails. People crowd the bridge edges to catch close glimpses of the raging river as it flows southerly. Debris and rubble slam against the bridge as the water continues to roll and trains fail to cross the river, fearing submersion. Obviously, this image complements the active image entitled *Danger Ahead*, because of the proximity of the bridge to the raging flood, the threat of danger, and the potential power nature reserves over human technologies. All of the images containing rail bridges represent a combination of respect and fear for nature that centers on the bridge standing over a problematic location.

Suspension Bridges

Two motifs surround depictions of suspensions bridges—peaceful crossings and dangerous locations. In 1919, Walter Pach sketched a peaceful image of the Brooklyn Bridge using only black ink (Figure 12).⁶¹ The image does not show the riparian area under its span, only the middle-class homes lining the outlying borders of the borough. The massive support columns of the suspension bridge present the focal point of the sketch towering above the houses in an almost gothic genre. An onlooker easily identifies the image as inspirational and awing—large and powerful.

Hudson River at West Point, (Figure 13) represents the second art piece in this study involving peaceful waters under a suspension bridge.⁶² Olivia C. Starring's masterpiece includes an eclectic depiction consisting of a crossing, recreation area,

⁶⁰1908 *Brazos Flood – Rail Bridges*.

⁶¹Walter Pach, *Brooklyn Bridge*, etching on paper , 1919, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

⁶²Olivia C. Starring, *Hudson River at West Point*, watercolor and pencil on paper , 1889, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

several boats, and a massive suspension bridge in one scene. In the bottom right of the piece, two houses quietly rest on the banks of the Hudson while strollers amble down a boardwalk on the opposing shore. The great suspension bridge represents one of the greatest aspects of the painting because of its size and height. The calm waters below the mighty crossing provide a safe passage for small clipper ships beneath the bridge's center point, as the supports rest on the top of a massive stone efface. The painting likely depicts the autumn months of foliage color changes and emphasizes the beauty of nature during cooler temperatures that occur before the bitter cold of winter.

Famous local photographer and historian Fred Gildersleeve depicts the Waco/Brazos River Suspension bridge in a similar manner to both Pach and Starring. In *Suspension Bridge Over the Brazos River* (Figure 14), the Waco Suspension Bridge spans the peaceful Brazos on a warm, sunny day.⁶³ The aspect of the photo remains unclear, in that, viewers cannot determine which side of the river Gildersleeve created the photograph. The bridge dons billboards and commercial advertising of the day, including one powerful arch on either of the bridge's columns. The suspension towers stand as castle gates, granting safety to all who cross under its powerful support-structure. A lantern hangs from the center post of the bridge illuminating the boarded-pathway during the night for any travelers. The river features relatively short, but rich vegetation, while the lawn adjacent to the bridge appears to be landscaped and manicured.

This depiction of the Waco Suspension Bridge compares directly with Pach and Starring by drawing the attention of the viewer toward the rook-type caps on the pinnacle of the bridge's primary structural supports, while also depicting the recreational value of

⁶³Fred Gildersleeve, *Suspension Bridge Over the Brazos River*, Suspension Bridge Photographs, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

the area, as demonstrated by Starring's depiction. The bridge stands proudly, drawing a viewer's attention directly to the powerful support cables in an almost belittling gothic fashion, as demonstrated by Pach. The rich vegetation and lush greenery depicts a peaceful scene of aesthetics that few other photographs of the Waco Suspension Bridge possess.

Second, an understood counter-depiction of danger also coincides with popular perception of suspension bridges and river crossings in various art pieces. Traditionally, architects developed suspension bridges for high points and deep gorges capable of providing support treacherous locations where Romanesque-arch style bridges failed. Suspension bridges support immense amounts of weight using the high columns and support cables and span out like inverted levels in the sky using several steel cables tension for support.

In 1870, Charles Bierstadt depicted a suspension bridge resting high atop turbulent waters in *The Rapids, Below Suspension Bridge* (Figure 15).⁶⁴ The beautiful depiction of the waves and currents demonstrate the raw aesthetics of riparian locations, even when dangerous; however, the painting also represents death and instant peril for any human attempting to cross without the safety of the high bridge. Bierstadt's painting represents one of the few depictions of a lone suspension bridge where the bridge, itself, refrains from acting as the chief focal point. The primary focal image remains the large wave crashing in the near-center of the piece—indicating power and instability. The waves serve as the focal point further indicating the danger and trouble experienced by any creature foolish enough to cross.

⁶⁴Charles Bierstadt, *The Rapids, Below Suspension Bridge*, albumen print on paper, 1870, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

At 5:00pm, on Wednesday, 3 December 1913, Fred Gildersleeve captured an image from the top of the old Waco City Hall downtown that recorded the greatest-known flood on the Brazos River (Figure 16).⁶⁵ The camera reveals all of the primary bridges of downtown Waco near submerged under the raging floods. The photograph depicts few, if any, people on the bridge because of the threat of danger.

Both Gildersleeve's and Bierstadt's images depict bridges, raging water, and possible danger. Both images depict water as the focal objective of each image—either rapids or immense currents. Bierstadt's image fails to depict any buildings or structures, but Gildersleeve's images include the structural references for gauging the impact of the flood's devastation.

Traditional Bridges

John Moran, American artist, drafted a landscape scene titled *View of River with Bridge* during the 1860s (Figure 17).⁶⁶ The grand view from a hilltop presents the primary focal objective of the art piece. The rich riparian valley sits illuminated in sunlight as a lone bridge rests unmolested to the south of a village. The serenity of the scene transcribes into a peaceful interpretation of this riparian zone. Several lone trees intermittently scatter across the close proximity of the painting's point of view. The sky encompasses a strong majority of the painting—increasing the light's impact on the image.

⁶⁵“The Brazos River at 5 o'clock Wednesday Afternoon,” *The Waco Times-Herald*, 7 December 1913; Fred Gildersleeve, *Brazos River Flood of 1913*, The Brazos River Flood of 1913, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

⁶⁶John Moran, *View of River with Bridge*, albumen print, 1860s, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

Fred Gildersleeve displayed the Washington Bridge over the Brazos River (Figure 18) similarly to that of Thomas Moran in his *Scenic View of the Iron Bridge*.⁶⁷ Gildersleeve's image depicts the lush banks of the Brazos River on a sunny day. The vegetation indicates warm weather through excessive greenery and river levels. The landscaped grass in front of the photo indicates the concern of locals to preserve the semi-riparian zone from flooding and increase general aesthetics. Gildersleeve likely captured *Scenic View of the Iron Bridge* at a time near *Suspension Bridge Over the Brazos River* because of the similarity in photograph style, depiction, river levels, weather, and overall format—the two images largely complement each other in technique, angle, gusto, and process. However, Gildersleeve's photograph and Moran's painting differ on several realms—perspective, detail, and landscape preservation. Gildersleeve photographed his image on the banks of the river and not at the top of a hill, as Moran's perspective indicates. Gildersleeve's background details do not include a town or other imagery—only manicured grasses rolling toward the massive iron bridge. No other human-orientated objects enter the photograph's propinquity. Last, Gildersleeve's photograph depicts the top third as sky and bottom as pruned grass. Moran's artwork also includes a large portion of the sky because the sky serves as the source of light needed for brilliant illumination and suggested importance on the riparian subject. Further, the vegetation Moran depicts appears more indigenous and aesthetic than Gildersleeve's subject compiled of mown grass, a low river, and no blazing light-source.

⁶⁷Fred Gildersleeve, *Scenic View of the Iron Bridge*, Washington Ave Bridge Pictures, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Frank Raymond depicts the Chicago River (Figure 19) as a gloomy, congested region in 1911.⁶⁸ A lone bridge crosses the congested dock area entering an urban jungle. The toll house rests in the center of the bridge as users cross over the river in large numbers. Two men sit lazily, eyeing the river currents sweeping by them while thick smog littered with blackness engulfs the air. Several small, unattended boats tethered to the docks float vertically in the waves. The image depicts a rough, urban center filled with pollution and overpopulation. Industrialization obviously rests at the focal point of this ink sketch and the artists medium (black ink and ivory paper) perfectly records the image with congested black lines of ink.

Fred Gildersleeve depicts the cluster of Waco Brazos bridges during the 1913 flood (Figure 20), examining the impact of a river flood in Waco and approaches the flood from several complementary issues.⁶⁹ First, Gildersleeve's image demonstrates the proximity of industry to the river with great precision. Second, in an artistic depiction, flood waters roll past the camera at a steady pace, simultaneously flooding the nearby industrial developments of central Waco. Third, the Washington Avenue/Iron Bridge spanning the Brazos combines with the other downtown bridges in the foreground, while the river itself appears to be at an equal height to each autonomous structure.

Gildersleeve's dramatic, pictorial depiction of the Brazos flood compares excellently with the *Chicago River* sketch by Frank Raymond because of the details associated with each depiction. Both pieces depict the complexities of the late Gilded

⁶⁸Frank Raymond, *Chicago River*, etching, 1911, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁹Fred Gildersleeve, *Photograph of the Waco bridges during flood*, Brazos River Floods, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Age in locating industrial zones near water sources. Debris riddles the banks of the Brazos River in Gildersleeve's photograph during the 1908 or 1909 flood. The portrayal of the flood presents the primary difference in the artwork of Gildersleeve and Raymond. The Brazos experienced an increase of pollution in the water largely because of the flooding in an industrial block, instead of the constant runoff in the Chicago depiction. The Chicago River, experiencing pollution and destruction on a daily basis from the industrial park, conflicts with the Brazos, which commonly experienced the greatest pollution levels after violent flood waters claimed pollutants outside of the Brazos' common boundary.

Vast Views

Rail lines represented one of the safest methods of transportation across the Nebraska territory in the mid-nineteenth century. Andrew Joseph Russell photographed a large, semi-arid mountain valley west of Omaha, Nebraska, in 1869, from a relatively high elevation (Figure 21).⁷⁰ Two men stand in front of the camera, facing the riparian valley a thousand feet below. Houses, roads, and snake-like river-twists riddle the valley. Viewers inspect the rugged terrain littered with shrubs, grasses, and small trees clinging to the ungracious mountains. Though considered a dangerous location by contemporary standards, the vantage point represents one of the safest locations because of the buffer created between elevation and the distance between the viewers from the formidable river below.

⁷⁰Andrew Joseph Russell, *Weber, from One Thousand Feet Elevation, from the Great West Illustrated in a Series of Photographic Views across the Continent taken along the line of the Union Pacific Railroad West from Omaha, Nebraska*, albumen print on paper mounted on paperboard, 1869, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

In 1909, Fred Gildersleeve photographed the Bosque River from Lover's Leap (Figure 22), several hundred yards before joining the Brazos River on its sluggish march to the ocean.⁷¹ The image represents one of Gildersleeve's most-famous images of the local area because of its aesthetics rooted in riparian merit. The sharp limestone cliff jags downward to the rolling river and the lush, deciduous trees along the banks. The Bosque River curves naturally from the northwestern farm lands in the distance while the calm, muddy waters reflect the image of the trees alongside the steady flow. The height of the image provides the viewer with the opportunity to experience a local, vast view and survey the river from a safe location, free from the menacing threat of floods.

Russell and Gildersleeve's images share similar focal objectives in each photograph. Both photographers simultaneously frame the river with a spectacular, natural view. Both rivers curve through semi-forested regions and village/farms. These images depict the paradox of progress during the Gilded Age—preservation of the rich, beautiful Western lands during an age when industrial progress represented an unstoppable, social inertia.

Most Reflected Trends

Over time, many artistic depictions supported interpretive themes that provided common comparisons between national and local riparian depictions in aiding the aesthetic perils of industrialization. For example, during the Gilded Age, many American artists viewed rivers as the classic representation of both danger and safety. The Hudson River Valley School of artistry predominantly observed rivers as a central mode of

⁷¹Lover's Leap in Cameron Park represents the highest point in McLennan County, Texas; Fred Gildersleeve, *Lover's Leap—Cameron Park*, 1909, Lover's Leap – Cameron Park, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

identification that differentiated American culture from European culture. As times progressed, the previously aesthetic riparian imagery of early Americana evolved into a caricature of progress and human development in the American West. Rivers streamlined beautiful centers of artistic focus, but also represented the potential for urban development. Artists enjoyed portraying rivers in diversified mediums between the changing American forerunners, while continually maintaining an emphasis on the inclusion of new subjects classified as riparian topics during the evolving times.

Rivers represented the potential for sustainable development, as well as, the potential for damage and death. An overwhelming majority of all Brazos River images occurring before 1920 depict either catastrophic floods or the various bridges that span the river (sometimes during a flood). These images largely focus on bridges because bridges represent the focal point of crossing and freedom from dangerous crossings previously experienced along the river. The bridges provide the common human connection between commercial ventures, as well as, industrialization. Architecture and industry created several safe routes for commerce and progress to develop along the rich riparian valley. However, artists also thoroughly enjoy depicting the times when technology failed and the river devastated human industrial/commercial developments adjacent to riparian zones.

Artists constantly illustrated the views of what contemporaries considered the sublime in all artistry, but these definitions evolved to represent different patterns over time. Waco photographers depicted Waco as the sublime of the Brazos River in pictorial representations—but photographers did not retain the same emotions toward sublimity as did early American painters. The common presence of industry and bridges in local

images of the Brazos River lend observers to believe that Waco photographers interpreted the sublime in terms of technological advancements in architecture, industry, and commerce—not focusing solely on the river itself as an item of perfection. The incorporation of the bridges, industrial zones, commercial centers, and the Brazos River indicate that local photographers believed the Brazos River provided a balance between the contemporary develops of industrialization and the traditional American sublime. The change in cultural focus created a shift in topical subjects depicted by artists and represented the rise in a new method of riparian artistry.

Each depiction, local and national, demonstrates both the pacifism and fear associated with waterways of the American west, while other themes evolved with the implementation of technology and industry. Riparian romanticism commonly remained intact throughout the age, but adjusted to symbolize the synthesis of a new American culture rooted in machines and commercial power. The images referenced by this study each represent the gradual shift in Americana, using different contextual approaches and structures along local and national riparian zones. The sublime and the synthetic remain two common threads that evolve throughout each piece—displaying the reach of the imagery and industry during the early stages of American development.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

The Industrial Revolution of the Gilded Age created a new medium for American pride internationally and at home. The progressive developments of industry, power, and recognition provided the United States with the financial means and basic ingredients for establishing a new niche in the world. However, the effects of progress reared an ominous face in the form of pollution—something few boasting Americans associated with industrial pride. Following the recognition of industry's harsh realities, American artists provided the national culture with the primary source of cultural pride that could counter the negativity of industrialism—natural aesthetic riparian icons.

This study concludes that riparian artistry provided the greatest combatant for austere industrial vistas. Namely, riparian zones served as the most-effective natural component for American artists because of the traditional cultural role that rivers performed in the public spectrum. American artists depicted numerous riparian zones as the centers and focal images for national identity in the decades following the American Revolution. The scholastic and tradition emphasis on nature caused the public to only further embrace nature as one of the purest creations of God and a worthy opponent to man's industrial environments.

Environmental ethics served a substantial capacity in the overall developmental actions by providing the criteria for evaluating the true extent of industrial progress. American culture discovered many profitable origins in the natural landscapes of the

continent and, often, measured the legitimacy of commercial and industrial developments in response to the abundance of resources and pristine creation remaining in the wilderness. As the century progressed, most American artists portrayed both bridges/crossings and rivers simultaneously—reflecting the gradual political and commercial growth along the riparian zones as industrialization became a new icon for Americana. In most instances, national and local photographs included similar basic trends—bridges, crossings, recreation, or lookout points that provided a source of beauty in the midst of synthetic scenery. As times evolved, artistry evolved and slowly encompassed commercial development combining the classic roots of the American sublime with the new trends of the Industrial Revolution.

The eclectic mixture of local and national environmental artwork demonstrates the strength of this study by providing specific instances when art provided compensation for commercial and industrial development. The selected images provide an environmental commentary via artistry on an epic struggle between American industry and nature, civil and savage, exquisite and dire, or pleasing and essential. Each image dramatically details the struggle and balance between preserving nature while attempting to capitalize on the same pristine resources. In other scenarios, some American artists used natural disasters as artistic expressions that emphasized moments when the sublime conquered the synthetic. Most of these examples illustrate bridges somewhere in the picture because bridges serve as the experimental object experiencing the wrath of nature.

In most cases, the differences between the quality of national artists and local photographers remain apparent when evaluating the details of each piece. National-level artists depict most riparian subjects with illustrious grandeur in an attempt to show the

world the beauty and raw power that American aesthetics represent. The artist responsible for each national image painstakingly scoped the vantage point and created an image that he or she believed represented the epitome of the scene. Local artists hold a different agenda—document the events of daily life as they unfold and maybe sell a few photographs to private buyers in the process. Local artists did not typically work under the same parameter of the national artists, in that, most artists photographed the river to record the scope of tragedy or demonstrate the interaction of the community with the river. Local artwork represents the river as it truly flowed and local artwork was rarely staged or manipulated for the scene. The intention and motivation behind each art piece presents the common differences between the artistic quality and why this study does not include any paintings of the Brazos River.

This study also concludes that local and national American waterways represent the best compensation for developing new emphases on industrialization while compensating for a surge in commercial growth. Bridges represent the cleanest link between nature and industry because bridges only develop where industry and commerce demand safe passage. The importance of bridges remains a concept universally held between both national and local artists and depictions. Most artists chose to incorporate the technological advancements in progressive architecture in order to demonstrate how riparian zones could beautify industrialism and provide a clean synthesis consisting of cultural development, advancement, and the natural sublime. The environmental values portrayed emphasized in the incorporation of industrial development and riparian zones, demonstrate the validity of the thesis.

The traditional view of the American sublime involves the establishment of a completely American subject filled with vast resources and raw beauty void of European influence. Other interpretive artistry emerges in an almost-transcendentalist approach to nature as the antithesis to industrialization where nature served as the ultimate purifier for the human soul. Various images selected in this study depict industrial development in the foreground as a slummy, rough, difficult stead—a place that attempted to control the power of nature adjacent to any/all industrial complexes. Initially, an observer could easily make the same conclusion about depictions of Waco—nature destroys most developments and causes Wacoans to struggle developing their location because of the instability created by the river. But, local residents of Waco viewed the river as more than a location of tainted death and danger; in fact, most Wacoans viewed the Brazos riparian zone as a center of local heritage and one of the primary sources for cultural identification.

This study concludes that national and local images of riparian perception share similar traits. Recreational techniques expressed by national artistry complemented documented photographs of the Brazos River—the seasons changed, but the concept, emphasis, and aesthetic criteria remained constant. Americans desired a shift from complete nature toward industrial developments but simultaneously continually sought to maintain the traditional American view on riparian nature as one of the primary methods in defining American culture. Industrialism and commercialism remained a constant ingredient in cultural development throughout most images presented by local artists via objects of each photo and each photo highlighting the bridges. The national and local

artistry of 1870-1920 each conclude the same results—economic trends shift, fashions change, the ethics change—but the beauty of a river remains pure and indescribable.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

The following images are not included in the online version of this thesis in order to conform to federal copyright agreements; however, a printed version of this thesis, (with the inclusion of each image) is available at the Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Figure 1. *Idle Hours*. Chase, William Merritt. Oil on Canvas. The Amon Carter Museum: Forth Worth, Texas. 1894.

Figure 2. *Gathering at the Bottoms*. Fred Gildersleeve. Cameron Park Photographs. The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Figure 3. *Cliffs of the Green River*. Thomas Moran. The Amon Carter Museum: Forth Worth, Texas. 1874.

Figure 4. *Washington Crossing*. Ernest C. Piexotto. Smithsonian American Art Museum: Washington, D.C. 1897.

Figure 5. *Low Brazos Crossing*. Brazos River Photographs. The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco Texas.

Figure 6. *Ferry Boat on the Brazos River*. Brazos River Photographs. The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Figure 7. *Dale Creek Bridge*. Charles Roscoe. Smithsonian American Art Museum: Washington, D.C. 1885.

Figure 8. "Danger Ahead." Winslow Homer. *Appeltons' Journal of Literature, Science, and Art*. 30 April 1870. Smithsonian American Art Museum: Washington, D.C.

Figure 9. *Railroad Bridges, facing South*. Brazos River Photographs. The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Figure 10. *1908 Flood of the Brazos – Elm Street*. 1908 Brazos River Flood. The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 1908.

Figure 11. *1908 Brazos Flood – Rail Bridges*. 1908 Brazos River Flood. The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 1908.

Figure 12. *Brooklyn Bridge*. Walter Pach. Smithsonian American Art Museum: Washington, D.C. 1919.

Figure 13. *Hudson River at West Point*. Olivia C. Starring. Smithsonian American Art Museum: Washington, D.C. 1889.

Figure 14. *Suspension Bridge Over the Brazos River*. Fred Gildersleeve. Suspension Bridge Photographs. The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Figure 15. *The Rapids, Below Suspension Bridge*. Charles Bierstadt. Smithsonian American Art Museum: Washington, D.C. 1870.

Figure 16. *Brazos River Flood of 1913*. Fred Gildersleeve. The Brazos River Flood of 1913, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. 1913.

Figure 17. *View of River with Bridge*. John Moran. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

Figure 18. *Scenic View of the Iron Bridge*. Fred Gildersleeve. Washington Ave Bridge Pictures. The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Figure 19. Raymond, Frank. *Chicago River*. Smithsonian American Art Museum: Washington, D.C. 1911

Figure 20. *Photograph of the Waco bridges during flood*. Fred Gildersleeve. Brazos River Floods. The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Figure 21. *Weber, from One Thousand Feet Elevation, from the Great West Illustrated in a Series of Photographic Views across the Continent taken along the line of the Union Pacific Railroad West from Omaha, Nebraska*. Andrew Joseph Russell. Smithsonian American Art Museum: Washington, D.C. 1869.

Figure 22. *Lover's Leap—Cameron Park*. Fred Gildersleeve. Lover's Leap – Cameron Park. The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 1909.

APPENDIX B

Duplications of copyright forms are not included in the online version of this thesis because the protected images are not included in this study.

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