

# TEACHER'S GUIDE

## Document Based Activity

### Part 3: Raiding the Iron Horse

#### MISSION 3: "A Cheyenne Odyssey"

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#### "American Progress"

#### **A NOTE TO THE EDUCATOR:**

*John Gast's "American Progress," while not considered a great work of art, is very representative of the types of commercial art that were popular in nineteenth century-America. Originally commissioned as an illustration for a series of travel guides, "American Progress" portrays the spirit of Manifest Destiny – the idea of America's God-given right to expand westward to the Pacific Ocean.*

*From the perspective of white settlers and the US government, westward expansion was necessary for the economic success of the nation. Westward expansion would provide economic opportunity for the influx of immigrants seeking cheap land in a new world. While westward expansion would lead to the displacement of the Plains Indian nations, Americans were confident that Indians would benefit from becoming assimilated into "civilized" society.*

*Of course, Plains Indians such as the Northern Cheyenne viewed westward expansion differently. In Part 3 of the game, Little Fox and other Cheyenne warriors raid a train, led by Chief Roman Nose, a real leader of the Northern Cheyenne. Attacking railroads was not only a way of acquiring products (guns, ammunition, supplies, etc.) that the Indians found useful; they were also assaults on one of the most obvious harbingers of America's westward expansion. White Americans responded to these attacks by building more forts to protect the railroads, since they were so important to westward expansion. The quest to protect railroads, and the Indian responses, often led to treaty violations, as you will see in Part 4 of "A Cheyenne Odyssey."*

*In "American Progress," Gast uses symbols that would have been familiar to viewers of his day to tell the glorious story of America's westward expansion. In this activity, students are asked to carefully "read" the painting in order to decode Gast's message and to explore the ideology of Manifest Destiny. In the extension activities, they are asked to consider Gast's message about westward expansion from the perspectives of the Northern Cheyenne.*

#### *Steps to Complete:*

- 1. Students complete Part 3 of the game. Briefly discuss what they experienced to ensure they understand the major points introduced.*
  - 2. Distribute the source packets to students divided into groups of 3-4.*
  - 3. Instruct students to carefully examine the painting, using the accompanying questions to decode Gast's symbolism.*
  - 4. Debrief the activity as a class by discussing the groups' responses to the questions, and assign the extension activities.*
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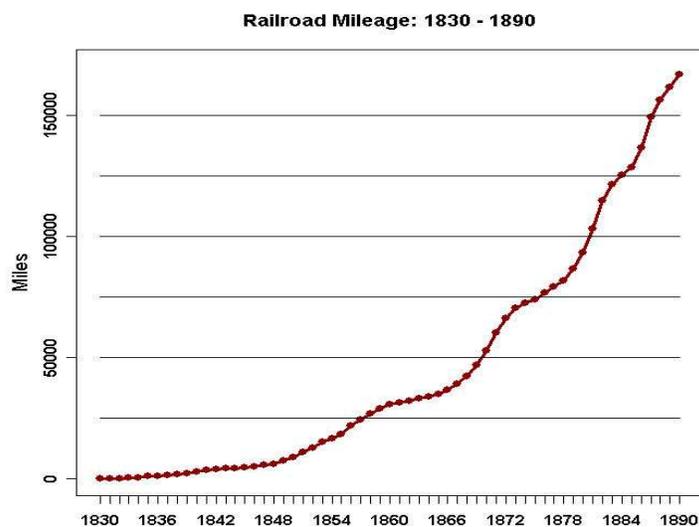
#### "American Progress" Background Information and Instructions

John Gast, a German immigrant, was a painter based in Brooklyn, New York. In 1872, he was hired to paint *American Progress*. The painting itself is very small, measuring 12  $\frac{3}{4}$ " by 16  $\frac{3}{4}$ ," but was widely distributed as a reproduction in travel guides and as larger lithographs (posters that were mass produced using a new printing process).

*American Progress* embodied the concept of Manifest Destiny, the belief that American society had the God-given right to expand westward, eventually reaching the Pacific Ocean. Along with this right, nineteenth-century Americans believed that they had the responsibility to bring their superior forms of government, culture, and religion to the "uncivilized" Indians, who would benefit greatly from adopting Western ideas.

The telegraph and railroads were crucial to westward expansion. Not only did they make communication and transportation easier as white settlers moved westward; they also symbolized the "civilizing mission" that accompanied Manifest Destiny. The construction of railroads, especially transcontinental ones, exploded after the Civil War.

Examine the chart below. What does it tell you about the expansion of railroads after the Civil War?



Source: [http://voteview.com/rtopic1\\_ucsd\\_3b.htm](http://voteview.com/rtopic1_ucsd_3b.htm).

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Now, examine the map below. How might the routes of these new railroads have affected Indians living on the Great Plains, like the Northern Cheyenne, in areas that included present-day states, such as Montana, Wyoming, and North and South Dakota?



Source: <http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/projector.php?lid=719&type=educator>

The railroads were a revolution in transportation. People could travel comfortably and safely in much shorter times. Goods could be transported more efficiently, and to a wider range of places. While the cost of shipping a ton of freight for one mile was double the cost of shipping via water, dependable access to new places and speed often made rail shipment worth the expense. Although white Americans enthusiastically embraced the benefits of this revolution, railroads represented a significant challenge to the traditional way of life of Plains Indians such as the Northern Cheyenne.

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**Directions:**

The purpose of a work of art is to initiate a conversation between an artist and a viewer. **What conversation is Gast starting in *American Progress***? Examine the painting carefully in order to decode the symbolism Gast uses to convey his perspective on westward expansion. Answer the questions on the next page to help you better understand how Gast tells the story of Manifest Destiny.



John Gast, *American Progress*, 1872.  
Chromolithograph published by George A. Crofutt.  
Source: Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

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1. The sense of movement in the painting is from right to left, from East to West. Why is this important in the painting? What is Gast saying about the relationship between the East and the West?
2. Five modes of transportation are illustrated in the painting. What are they? Do you think Gast painted them in any particular order (hint: look from right to left)?
3. Find the Indians, buffalo, and other animals in the painting. What are they doing? What is Gast saying about the future of the "wild" frontier?
4. What are the men in the lower right hand corner of the painting doing? Do you think they are travellers passing through, or settlers who are planning on making their homes on this land?
5. The woman in the center of the painting is dressed in an ancient Greek toga. She wears the "Star of Empire" on her head, carries a schoolbook in her right hand, and is stringing a telegraph wire with her left. Why is she carrying a book and a telegraph wire? What is Gast saying about the benefits of westward expansion by including these objects? Why is the woman looking and moving westward?
6. Why did Gast name his painting *American Progress*? What does the title of the painting tell you about his perspective on westward expansion and Manifest Destiny?

#### **Extension Activities**

Use one of the following activities to explore Manifest Destiny from the perspective of the Northern Cheyenne.

1. In 1866, Roman Nose, a Northern Cheyenne warrior, stated:

**"We will not have the wagons [steam locomotives] which make a noise in the hunting grounds of the buffalo. If the palefaces come farther into our land, there will be scalps of your brethren in the wigwams of the Cheyennes. I have spoken."**

From "Native American Warriors Describe the Threats to their Way of Life," *HERB: Resources for Teachers*, accessed August 8, 2013, <http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1541>

Analyze *American Progress* from Roman Nose's point of view. What would he say about the symbolism used and the message of the painting?

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2. Create a painting or drawing of your own depicting *American Progress* from Little Fox's perspective. What symbols would he use, and how would he portray American westward expansion?