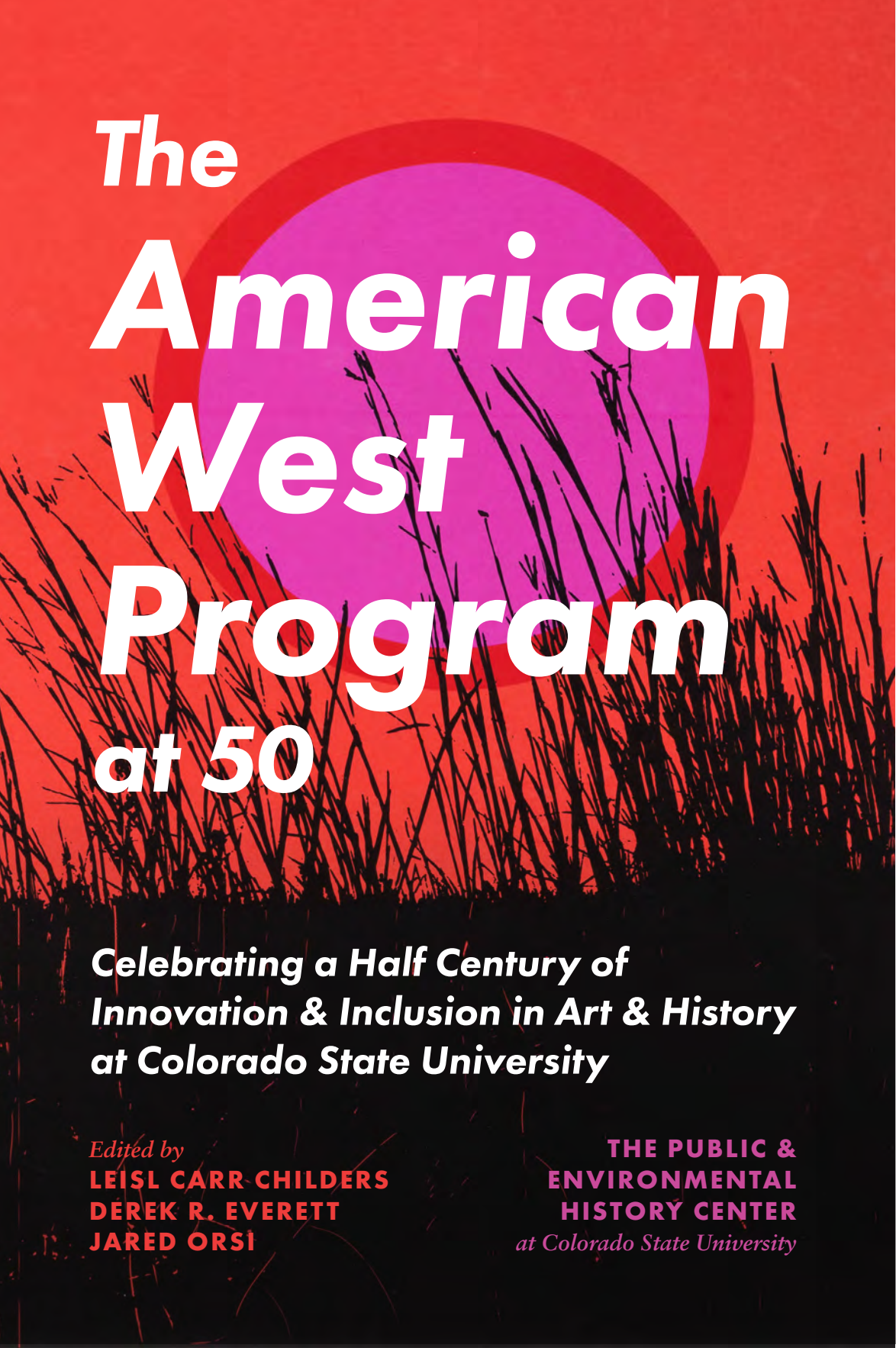

The
American
West
Program
at 50
Celebrating a Half Century of
Innovation & Inclusion in Art & History
at Colorado State University
Edited by
LEISL CARR CHILDERS
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THE PUBLIC &
ENVIRONMENTAL
HISTORY CENTER
at Colorado State University

The ***American West Program*** at 50

The American West Program at 50: Celebrating a Half Century of Innovation and Inclusion in Art and History at Colorado State University.

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Edited by Leisl Carr Childers, Derek R. Everett, and Jared Orsi.

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The ***American West Program*** at 50

The American West Program at Colorado State University, 1972 to 2022

Leisl Carr Childers

For five decades the American West Program (AWP) at Colorado State University (CSU) has signified the university's commitment to the region in which the school is located and has exemplified the university's land grant mission. The AWP brings together scholars and community members around issues that affect the region and the state of Colorado in particular. It has had different manifestations based on changes within CSU's administration and the university's budget. But what has made the AWP so special is that in all of its configurations, organizers have drawn from the best scholarship on the history of the American West, worked to elevate historical actors and stories of the past that are often overlooked, and brought together two fields, public and environmental history, that emerged at the very moment in which the AWP was birthed.

In May 1969, just after the spring academic semester ended,

department chair of Recreation Resources Arthur T. Wilcox, a scholar trained at the University of Michigan who specialized in recreational management and park planning, met with three National Park Service (NPS) regional directors and the agency's chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the role CSU would play in the centennial celebration of the founding of Yellowstone National Park and the birth of the national park idea. Wilcox hoped to host a symposium on the centennial and a tour of Yellowstone led by CSU in the aftermath of the Second World Conference on National Parks, later known as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Parks Congress, to be held in the fall of 1972. This convergence of events—a global conference, a park centennial, and a CSU symposium—would draw attention to the role CSU played in training park managers.[1] It also laid the foundation for what would become the university's American West Program, a public-facing program that has spanned fifty years and highlighted CSU's emphasis on and expertise in the region.

The conversation between Wilcox and NPS officials marked the culmination of "a great many years" of research done by CSU faculty on Yellowstone National Park. Park service personnel were "tremendously impressed with the curriculum growth in the [Recreation Resources] department," created in 1967 to address the management of natural resources for outdoor recreational, use under the leadership of Wilcox.[2] The National Park Service knew CSU as the "ranger factory," a "major producer of park professionals." Wilcox wanted to elevate that concept further by having CSU "add luster to the national park idea" by including other colleges throughout the university. He envisioned creating a symposium that would feature scholars examining the history of the park and its current management and result in a commemorative publication that would complement the proceedings of the Second World Conference on National Parks, which itself was to be sponsored by the National Parks Centennial Commission.[3]

Wilcox's colleague Joseph Angell, CSU's director of University Relations and a faculty member in the Department of English, and the University Special Events Board backed the endeavor and suggested the 1972 summer programming focus not just on the park centennial but also on the "general theme of 'The American

West.'" To Wilcox, Angell, and other organizers, the national park idea was embedded in the history of the American West, and it was this theme that provided the "unifying theme as a basis for cultural programs." CSU's assets, whether in the humanities, social sciences, or hard sciences, were squarely grounded in the region. Broadening the theme encompassed more of what CSU had to offer. Organizers no longer planned the program as a follow-up to the Second World Conference on National Parks. Rather, the Our Western American Heritage symposium at CSU, held in the summer of 1972, set the stage for the national park centennial. Wilcox explained to National Park Service officials that Colorado in general and the Front Range in particular afforded attendees a "good look at BLM [Bureau of Land Management], Forest Service, and several national park areas" and "an outstanding look at a broad cross section of the mountain west from shortgrass prairie and semi-desert to alpine mountains."[4] Wilcox and Angell took the idea to CSU president Adrian R. Chamberlain, who gave his support, both administratively and financially.[5]

Planning the first AWP proceeded rapidly. By June 1971, Wilcox, Angell, and CSU's Cultural Programs Committee, which Wilcox chaired, had laid out the elements of the Our Western American Heritage symposium. These included academic sessions and summer school classes, Agricultural Extension and 4-H programs, films, exhibits, and guest speakers, Hispanic and Indigenous cultural programs, and a rodeo.

The team planned to make the symposium public facing to raise the university's profile. Wilcox wrote the team, "We should use this occasion as an excuse to make CSU a true center of University interest in Western American Culture." At the end of his memo, he noted the connection of the university to the Western History Association (WHA), an academic organization not even a decade old that served as the professional home and primary forum of conversation for scholars of the American West, sometimes called western historians.[6]

The centering of CSU as a leader in scholarship about the American West, its history, its land and environment, and its people, emerged at a moment in the intuition's history when the university faced serious upheaval. As with many universities that experienced rapid growth in their enrollments in the post–World War

II era, CSU's student body was more intellectually and socially diverse than ever before. Student opposition to the Vietnam War and local businesses that discriminated against Black and Hispanic students, support for civil rights activists and relaxing many long-standing restrictive university residential policies, and shock over multiple political assassinations peaked in the 1968–69 school year. Students staged a beer-in to agitate for greater student-led governance, occupied the Agriculture Building to protest Dow Chemical's profiteering off the Vietnam War, and called for the resignation of CSU's president, William E. Morgan, for ignoring a culture of racism at the university.[7]

The subsequent emergence of the Black Student Alliance (BSA) and the Mexican American Committee for Equality (MACE) signaled the agency of these student voices and an urgency for institutional change. The next academic year, newly installed President Chamberlain witnessed similar protests. Members of the Union of Mexican American Students (the renamed MACE) pressured the administration to participate in the Delano grape strike and boycott, the BSA demonstrated against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints' exclusion of Blacks at a basketball game against Brigham Young University, and students against the Vietnam War—with faculty support—boycotted classes to protest the escalation of the war. In the wake of a concert held at the gymnasium, a deliberately set fire consumed the university's Old Main building, a structure that had served as CSU's administrative center since its founding. According to CSU historian James Hansen, penning a history of the university at the time of these events, "The violence associated with the BYU riot, the Old Main burning, and other confrontational incidents had very harmful public-relations implications for higher education and contributed to an insistence on accountability that significantly challenged academic leaders."[8] This created an opportunity for the proposed 1972 program to garner significant administrative support. CSU leadership saw the focus of the program, the past and present of national parks and the American West, as topics free from controversy and appealing to local audiences, a welcome alternative to the tensions of the time.

At the same time, Indigenous rights issues permeated the larger scholarly and educational context of American West history. The

1969 takeover of Alcatraz Island by Indians of All Tribes and the actions of the emerging Red Power movement shattered Americans' expectations of a disappeared Indigenous people and brought to the fore issues of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty.[9] In Colorado, the founding of the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) in 1970 by John Echohawk and David Getches at the University of Colorado, Boulder, cemented self-determination in the legal structure of federal Indian law and put Colorado at the forefront of Indigenous law.[10] Historians of the American West led much of the intellectual conversation. The WHA held its second annual conference in Denver in 1962, and subsequent programs regularly featured recent scholarship that addressed American Indian policy from well-regarded historians of Native American history such as Francis Paul Prucha (Marquette University), David Edmunds (University of Oklahoma), Donald L. Parman (Purdue University), Floyd O'Neill (University of Utah), Catherine S. Fowler (University of Nevada, Reno), Florence Hawley Ellis (University of New Mexico), Robert Delaney (Center of Southwest Studies), John C. Ewers (Smithsonian Institution), and Robert M. Utley (Chief Historian of the National Park Service).[11] The convergence of Indigenous activism and the scholarship of American West history significantly influenced the structure of the proposed 1972 program. CSU administrators may have seen the program as an opportunity for better public relations, but AWP organizers steered the content toward histories that resonated in the present, especially those surrounding the treatment of Indigenous peoples.

By the fall of 1971, Wilcox shortened the moniker of the summer program to the American West Program and enlisted the help of young, early-career history professor Dan Tyler. Tyler, who had worked with American West historian Charles Bayard at CSU and graduated in 1967 with a master of arts in history, completed his doctorate at the University of New Mexico in 1970 under the mentorship of Donald C. Cutter, another well-regarded historian of the region. Both Bayard and Cutter were esteemed early members of the WHA; Bayard specialized in public land policy and the Rocky Mountain West, and Cutter emphasized the settlement of the Southwest and U.S.-Mexico borderlands. CSU had hired Tyler immediately after his graduation from the University of New Mexico, and his research on water resources and policy in Colorado

and New Mexico placed him at the center of an emerging departmental focus on public history (history created for public consumption such as that found in museums, and history deployed in the public interest, such as that found in courts and government agencies) and environmental history (history that examined the human relationship with nature).[12]

Tyler wanted the "study of the West in the summers to have some relationship with contemporary problems."[13] This was the cornerstone of the history department's emerging expertise in public and environmental history. Public history and environmental history had always been part of the discipline, but in the early 1970s, the fields were coalescing around professional organizations and journals.[14] His involvement with the AWP at its inception helped bridge the WHA, cutting-edge work in Native American, public, and environmental history, and the university. CSU was one of a growing list of university sponsors during the first decade or so of the WHA's existence.[15] This relationship, and the recent scholarship that undergirded it, set the intellectual tone for the first program and a pattern for successive endeavors.

The 1972 program featured classes and workshops from a variety of different colleges and departments, informal lectures by CSU faculty called Campfire Conversations, a Thomas Moran exhibition of national park and western landscape paintings, a film festival featuring classic and contemporary westerns, jazz and bluegrass concerts, and the American West Stampede rodeo. Graphic artist and CSU alumnus Bob Coonts produced a poster for the annual event. Coonts created a rising purple sun over dark grasslands backed by a red sky that evoked the shortgrass prairie of the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains. Coonts's posters became the visual brand of the AWP for much of its life, creatively encapsulating the program's annual theme and helping promote the annual events more than any other medium.[16]

Two academic symposiums took place alongside the public-facing summer events. The fourteenth annual Western Resources Conference, "Outdoor Recreation and Environmental Quality," featured a luncheon address by Farrington R. Carpenter, the former director of the Grazing Service, and a keynote speech by Colorado Congressman Wayne Aspinall. An associated history conference on the American West sponsored by the Colorado State Historical

Society featured six sessions over three days and included scholars from Wichita State University, Fort Hays State University, Cameron College, the University of Utah, the New Mexico State Archives and Records Service, the Museum of New Mexico, the US Army Military Historical Research Collection, the Western History Research Center at the University of Wyoming, and the National Archives and Records Service. Program organizers invited Robert M. Utley, chief historian of the National Park Service and WHA president from 1967–68, to give the banquet address, "Yellowstone and the National Park Concept, 1872–1972," to highlight the centennial of the founding of Yellowstone National Park. The history symposium also featured CSU history professor Liston E. Leyendecker, who presented on his historic preservation work at Central City. Several addresses touched current contemporary Indigenous conversations. Clyde D. Dollar, historical consultant for the Dakota Sioux Tribe and a WHA member, presented on the "Modern Brule Sioux," and a panel devoted to teaching and writing Indian history featured Pueblo scholar Joe S. Sando (Southwest Cooperative Education Lab), Cahuilla/Luiseno scholar Edward Castillo (University of California, Riverside), Ojibwe scholar Roger Thomas (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee), and Joseph H. Cash (University of South Dakota).[17]

The history symposium resulted in a publication the following year edited by Tyler and titled *Western American History in the Seventies*. The anthology featured an introduction by Tyler that explained that "Colorado State University dedicated the summer of 1972 to the American West" and that the essays in the collection expressed "novel and utilitarian aspects of Western history." The anthology covered thematic areas ranging from historic preservation, conservation, and archival sources for western history to "History and the American Indian," "Women and the West," and tourism. The anthology did not feature all the papers presented at the symposium, and Tyler noted that "a number of the fine papers given were previously committed to publishers." Those that had been included in the volume, Tyler argued, "represent the broad spectrum of interests which Western historians have demonstrated in the past few years."[18] The exciting new scholarship emerging on the history of the American West within the WHA coupled with engaging public programming offered on the CSU campus did

prove incredibly popular. One *Rocky Mountain Collegian* reporter announced: "CSU as a cultural center? Don't laugh just yet."[19]

With the first American West program in 1972, CSU did indeed establish itself as an epicenter of research on the American West. The combination of administrative and financial backing from the Office of the President under Chamberlain's leadership, the Cultural Affairs Office led by Shelton Stanfill, the Office of the Academic Vice President, the Office of the Assistant Academic Vice President for Administration, college deans, department chairs, and the university summer school program alongside the history department's relationship with the WHA and the interests of faculty in several departments in American West history, and the Coonts poster that visually communicated the annual theme made for a robust, campus-wide program that drew hundreds of attendees.[20] For the next four years, this was the template for AWP's success.

In July 1972, with the AWP in full swing, Wilcox wrote Angell, "I believe we should use the experience of this summer to launch a continuing university summer program which will identify CSU as the 'place to go' for an outstanding program centered around the American West."[21] In January 1973, Chamberlain formed the American West Coordinating Board, headed by electrical engineering professor Russ Churchill, to oversee AWP programming. The CSU president supported continuing the AWP "into the indefinite future" using the same funding model, drawing on the resources of the entire campus. The board made plans to hold summer programs in 1973 (the American Southwest), 1974 (the American Northwest), 1975 (the Rocky Mountain West), and 1976 (the Colorado Centennial and American Bicentennial). In a memo to Angell, Chamberlain looked even further ahead, stating, "In subsequent years appropriate themes will be developed for emphasis within Colorado State University's overall program on the American West." The CSU president hoped the AWP would "realize its potential as a university program of regional and national importance."[22] Over the next five decades, the program shifted and changed relative to the type of administrative and faculty support it received. Sometimes these changes expanded the program, but more often, they restricted it. Even so, the connections to the WHA, an emphasis on current scholarship on the American West,

especially at the intersection of public and environmental history, and concern for Indigenous issues and perspectives remained.

The AWPs between 1973 and 1976 featured stunning thematic posters from Coonts, concerts by local and nationally recognized musicians, exhibitions of nationally recognized artists, annual American West Stampede rodeos, and a number of outstanding public figures and scholars. Colorado Senators Floyd Haskell and Gary Hart and Governor Richard Lamm provided keynote addresses; popular and influential writers such as Edward Abbey, David S. Lavender, and Carol S. Pearson held book talks; and noted scholars of the American West with deep affiliations with the WHA such as Rodman Paul (California Institute of Technology), W. Turrentine Jackson (University of California, Davis), John Porter Bloom (National Archives and Records Service), R. David Edmunds (University of Wyoming), Clyde D. Dollar and Joseph H. Cash (University of South Dakota), Henry Nash Smith (University of California, Berkeley), John C. Ewers (Smithsonian Institution), Howard Lamar (Yale University), and Paul Stewart, founder of the Black American West Museum, gave lectures and offered short summer courses in their research specialties.[23]

These programs also featured robust programming on Indigenous perspectives, especially around art, history, and contemporary issues. *Custer Died for Your Sins* and *God Is Red* author Vine Deloria Jr. (Lakota) gave addresses in 1974 and 1976. Lloyd H. Kiva New (Cherokee Nation), founder of the Institute of American Indian Arts, Blanche J. Wahnee (Kiowa, Comanche) of Haskell Indian Junior College, David Warren (Chippewa, Santa Clara Pueblo) from the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, Alan Slickpoo (Nez Perce) of the Nez Perce History and Culture Project, and writer James Jefferson (Southern Ute) of the Southern Ute Project provided perspectives on Indigenous arts. Mary Jean Moseley from Fort Lewis College, Shirley Hill Witt (Akwesasne Mohawk Nation) from Colorado College, Mary Pat Cuny Rambo from the University of South Dakota, and Ruth Roessel (Diné) from Navajo Community College offered additional thoughts on Indigenous education and other contemporary issues. Several of the papers on Native American history appeared in a second anthology edited by Tyler titled *Red Men and Hat-Wearers: Viewpoints on Indian History*.[24] Two of the five AWP posters during this period

featured Indigenous imagery to highlight the conference themes of the Southwest (1973) and Northwest (1974). At the time of their production, these posters communicated the centrality of Indigenous conversations within the context of the AWP for those years, especially with regard to lectures given by historians of the American West affiliated with the WHA. But today's understanding of these Indigenous images requires acknowledging that Coonts, and other artists of the twentieth century, used Indigenous imagery without consultation and permission and thus misappropriated those images. Subsequent posters that contained Indigenous imagery include *The Changing West* (1977), *The American West: Exploration* (1984), *The Frontier through the Eyes of . . . Encounter 1492–1992* (1992), and *Images of the West* (1994).

In 1977, the funding and focus of the AWP changed. With the conclusion of the 1976 program focused on Colorado's centennial and the nation's bicentennial, there was less justification for CSU administrators to support a large-scale, public summer program. Funding decreased from $12,000 to $1,500, a substantial reduction, especially considering the decade's inflationary context.[25] CSU's budget, and the state's budget as a whole, suffered significant cuts, and the university operated at a deficit. Declining enrollments in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (now the College of Liberal Arts) and in the College of Natural Sciences led administrators to hike tuition rates and trim faculty lines and course offerings, including those in the summer.[26] The AWP budget could fund the posters and some publicity but little else, especially guest artists and lecturers. According to Tyler, who became chair of American West Program Board that year, CSU was simply "not, in 1977, sufficiently well-funded to be able to support a cultural program." He noted, "We decided to take a different turn and to place the emphasis not on the cultural side of things so much as on the academic side of things, and we [would] go for outside funding to continue the American West as a viable academic program which was coordinated. In other words, we are creating, or have created, a new program which will coordinate a series of different academic offerings." Under his leadership, the AWP board emphasized summer school courses and lectures by faculty volunteering their time with a few guest speakers who could be compensated. Tyler sought those elements with a National Endowment for the

Humanities grant, which was not awarded.[27] The program continued but in pared-back fashion.

At the very moment the AWP seemed to have solidified as a viable public-facing program, it collapsed. The 1977 ("The Changing West") and 1978 ("The Great American Desert") events featured a limited set of programs, fewer speakers and classes, and almost no cultural offerings. Notable speakers included former Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall, climate scientist and humanist Walter Orr Roberts, first director of the National Center for Atmospheric Research at the University of Colorado, Boulder, noted Western historian Ray Allen Billington of the Huntington Library, and the Youngblood family, a Santa Clara Pueblo family of pottery artists who offered demonstrations and workshops in working clay throughout the summer.[28] After the 1978 program, however, there were no more AWPs, and between 1979 and 1983, CSU held summer courses and hosted public-facing lectures, but these were not specifically bundled together nor were they focused on the history and culture of the American West. Chamberlain, who supported AWP as its success grew and was willing to recommend the program as a line item in the budget, resigned in 1979. His successors, the interim Presidents Charles Neidt and Ralph E. Christoffersen, faced an increasingly difficult financial situation. Tough financial times for the state, which grappled with the energy crisis, rising inflation, federal budget cuts to higher education and student funding, and the crash of the oil shale boom, prompted a decline in state funding for the university. Administrators and faculty increasingly filled the gap with tuition increases and federal research grants.[29]

The loss of the AWP was particularly hard on the history department; Dan Tyler, David McComb, Liston E. Leyendecker, and Harry Rosenberg all served on the American West Program Coordinating Board. Other history faculty such as Ken Rock and James Hansen participated. Most of the support for the AWP in terms of faculty participation came from the humanities and social science disciplines. Visiting historians and CSU history faculty had offered a large subset of AWP lectures and courses. Rosenberg, a medieval historian who joined the history department in 1959, said the program offered "a focus for thought and understanding of our roots." Rosenberg had spent formative years in Vernal, Utah, and

Los Angeles, California. He liked that the AWP would reach an audience beyond the classroom.[30] It took until 1984 to convince the university to provide funding to jump-start the program again. Rosenberg, with the help of Vice President for Academic Affairs George Dennison, launched a nearly two-decade-long set of AWP annual events that elevated the stature of the history department. The College of Liberal Arts and the Office of the Provost helped support the program financially, particularly during the tenure of Loren Crabtree, a history professor who served as the CLA dean from 1991 to 1997 and provost from 1998 to 2001. Donor contributions to the American West Program foundation account also provided support. The program themes for the next decade and a half reflected classic themes within western history and debates within the field. Artist Bob Coonts once again created posters for each event that compellingly encapsulated each annual theme. The public attended lectures and exhibits largely for free and could pay to enroll in classes, join tours, and attend other special events.[31]

The themes of this iteration of the AWP focused on major themes in the region's history such as "The American West: Exploration" (1984), "Dust Bowl Days: The Winds of Change in the West" (1985), "Images of the West" (1994), "Eccentrics in the West" (1995), and "The Buffalo: An American Icon" (2000). Others marked significant anniversaries in the region or state, including "The Frontier through the Eyes of . . . Encounter 1492–1992" (1992) and "The Frontier through the Eyes of . . . Women's Suffrage 1893–1993" (1993). Often, AWP themes worked in tandem over a two-year span, such as "The Open Range to 1890: The Cowboy Frontier" (1986) and "Beyond the Frontier: Cowboys and Ranchers Since 1890" (1987); "Trails West: Explorers and Travelers Before 1869" (1988) and "Trails West 1869–1929: Trails to Rails" (1989); "The Frontier Town: Builders and Boosters" (1990) and "Western City Life in the 1920s: A Colorful Cast of Characters" (1991); "The West Beckoned" (1996) and "The West Still Beckons" (1997); "Manifest Destiny and the West to 1850" (1998) and "Manifest Destiny Realized, 1850–1898" (1999); and "The Outlaw" (2001) and "The Lawman" (2002). Common presenters from the Front Range included Black American West Museum director Paul Stewart, The Fort restaurant founder Sam Arnold, Colorado historian Duane E. Smith (Fort Lewis College), and singers

Liz Masterson and Sean Blackburn, who helped launch the City of Fort Collins's New West Fest. Prominent figures such as former Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall made appearances, and a host of park service preservationists and historians, particularly from Rocky Mountain National Park, reinforced the relationship the AWP had cultivated with the NPS two decades prior.[32]

But as the AWP evolved during this time, more and more the programming reflected an emerging schism between older and younger scholars of the American West. As it had before, the AWP drew historians who were well respected within the WHA. First among them was Patricia Nelson Limerick (University of Colorado, Boulder), whose seminal work *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (W. W. Norton, 1987) broadened the field beyond a focus on political leaders and the settler experience to emphasize women, persons of color, and the economic hardship and disparity many faced in moving west. Limerick first presented at the AWP in 1988 on the heels of her book's release and made recurring appearances in 1994, 2002, and later 2013 and 2018. Limerick's work, and that of her generation, was highly controversial. Many scholars of the American West wrote about a diversity of topics, but Limerick recentered the narrative to privilege these under-told stories. Within the WHA, some established scholars balked at Limerick's version of the region's past and worried about its impact on public audiences. Once scholar went so far as to suggest that these New Western Historians, "in their negativism and their critique of democratic values," were "destructive in conveying a realistic and truthful vision of the West, both to academicians and the general public. Their goals are not the stuff of scholarship but of propaganda."[33] This fracturing of the traditional story of the American West challenged the public's perception of not just the region but the nation's past and American identity itself. But as one *New York Times* journalist indicated, these post-Vietnam scholars spoke to a post-Vietnam society.[34] This was scholarship that highlighted a more useful past in the present.

Other noted WHA members who presented at these AWPs included Anne Butler (Utah State University), Margaret Connell Szasz and Ferenc Szasz (University of New Mexico), Charles E. Rankin (editor of *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* and CSU master of arts in history alum), James E. Sherow (Southwest

Texas State University and later Kansas State University), Shirley Ann Wilson Moore (California State University, Sacramento), Janet P. Fireman (Natural History Museum, Los Angeles, and later the California Historical Society), Rebecca Hunt (University of Colorado, Denver), Andrew Paul Hutton (University of New Mexico and WHA executive director), Brian W. Dippie (University of Victoria), Elliott West (University of Arkansas), Roger McGrath (Pepperdine University and historical commentator on many PBS documentaries on the American West), and Robert M. Utley (chief historian of the National Park Service).[35] The works of these scholars bridged the older, more publicly palatable stories of the region and the newer, more diverse pasts of the place. They also reflected the interests of the different generations attending the AWP. Presentations on women and the West occurred with some regularity, and the entire 1993 program celebrated the centennial of women's suffrage in the state. Presentations on Indigenous pasts also occurred regularly, though these largely privileged non-Indigenous perspectives. The 1992 program centered on the five hundredth anniversary of Columbus's arrival from an Indigenous perspective, and often the AWP showcased Native American collections in special exhibitions in the Lory Student Center. Many of the AWP's featured exhibitions displayed collections from a variety of different cultures.[36] Much of this cultural diversity became institutionalized with the birth of the Center for Applied Studies in American Ethnicity (CASAE) in 1990, and by 1997, faculty associated with the center offered classes in race and ethnicity as part of the summer program. CASAE's work in Native American, African American, Asian American/Pacific Islander, and Chicano studies laid the foundation for the creation of the Ethnic Studies department in 2008.[37] With this institutionalization, however, came criticism. In 1999, Indigenous students objected to reenactor Steven Alexander's portrayal of General George Armstrong Custer and sought to have the presentation cancelled. Although the university supported Alexander's Custer presentation for the AWP and also supported "Native Americans scheduling their own meeting with their speaker who would give the 'truth' about Custer, 'the Native Americans' Hitler,'" some damage was done to the integrity of the program. The AWP and the history faculty came across as unaccommodating and insensitive.[38]

With the departure of Provost Loren Crabtree, the AWP's key administrative supporter, in 2001 and the phased retirement beginning in 2002 of Rosenberg, who had been such a force in organizing the annual AWP programs and whose health had declined after major surgery, the program was once again at a crossroads. history department chair Ruth Alexander, the first woman to lead the department, worked with Rosenberg to tap the talent of Anne Wainstein Bond, a CSU lecturer who had worked for the Colorado Historical Society for nearly twenty years, to run the AWP.[39] Bond took over the programming for the 2003 AWP ("Into the West: The Louisiana Purchase and American Expansion") that commemorated the bicentennial of the Louisiana Purchase in terms of not just exploration but empire-building. She envisioned an AWP that was more community oriented and workshop based and sought to build partnerships with local public history organizations and K-12 teachers. This version privileged public history practices by emphasizing local and family history, community engagement, and teacher education through workshops held throughout the academic year and not just during the summer. And like the first AWP, Bond sought to involve other colleges and departments in the planning process and included new history faculty, such as Ann Little and Mark Fiege, in the discussion.[40] But Bond's vision never got funded. The AWP cost about $26,000 annually, and the new provost, Peter Nicholls, shifted responsibility for its funding to the College of Liberal Arts (CLA), led by Dean Robert Hoffert. The 2003 AWP program relied upon the Carl A. Bimson Humanities Seminar funding and large donations from long-time supporters such as financier E. Michael Rosser and, for the first time, required the sale of tickets to the lecture series. The Coonts posters that made the program so recognizable could no longer be funded.[41]

In 2004 ("Western Lands and Landscapes"), 2005 ("Growth and Development in the American West"), and 2006 ("Preserving Heritage in the West"), the AWP embraced the symposium and academic lecture format and sought to tackle current issues using historical methods. Speakers for these years included new history department faculty member Jared Orsi and Colorado historians Duane A. Smith (Fort Lewis College), Kathleen A. Brosnan (University of Houston, now University of Oklahoma), and Thomas

Andrews (California State University, Northridge, now University of Colorado, Boulder), all of whom were WHA members. Special guests included Judge Gregory J. Hobbs, Jr., of the Colorado Supreme Court, Bruce Runnels and Greg Gamble of the Nature Conservancy, and William Perry Pendley from the Mountain States Legal Foundation. [42]

By 2007, however, funding again dried up. The history department put the AWP on hiatus. That same year, history faculty Ruth Alexander, Mark Fiege, Janet Ore, and Gregory Smoak collaborated with anthropology professor Jason Labelle to create the Center for Public History and Archaeology (CPHA), a consortium of faculty working on public history and on historic preservation, cultural resource, and museum projects with the National Park Service and other governmental agencies.[43] As the history department moved away from supporting the AWP, the CPHA stepped in to fill the gap. Newly renamed as the Public Lands History Center (PLHC), the group's research focus and its ability to draw speakers and secure funding from the Lilla B. Morgan Memorial Endowment Fund paid for symposiums in 2011 ("National Parks Beyond the Nation: A Colloquium") and 2013 ("Coping with Extremes: A Western Water Symposium").[44] Although this symposium was not explicitly held under the AWP banner, it matched the spirit of the AWP in combining public and environmental history and including Indigenous voices; it was also deeply connected to the WHA.

In spring of 2014, the PLHC officially revived the AWP with a lecture by Jared Orsi on his new book, *Citizen Explorer: The Life of Zebulon Pike* (Oxford University Press, 2014). Subsequent symposiums and lectures from outstanding scholars who showcased the best of what the AWP had to offer followed in subsequent academic years, including "Flood, Fire, and Ice: Environmental History of Extremes" (2015), "100 Years of Rocky Mountain National Park" (2015), "Dual Natures: Stories from a Century of National Parks" (2016), "The Color of Our Parks: Nature, Race, and Diversity in the National Park Service" (2016), "Colorado Farmers and Ranchers: Land, Sustainability, and Bridges to Urban Communities" (2017), "Histories of Immigration, Histories of Place" (2018), and "Think Indigenous: Richard Oakes and the Red Power Movement" (2020), and the "American West Program

with Yufna Soldier Wolf" (2021).[45] Many of these programs featured Indigenous perspectives and voices, and all of them included WHA members.

Change comes to all public-facing programs, but over the five decades in which the AWP has survived and thrived through its many iterations, three elements endure. Organizers who commit to this name and this legacy embrace the relationship the AWP has always had with the WHA. They work to elevate voices from the past whose stories are not so often told. And they retain their commitment to working at the intersection of public history and the environment. As the PLHC evolves into the Public and Environmental History Center (PEHC) and strengthens its relationship with the history department and as the university recovers from the costs of the global pandemic and recommits to its public programming, new faculty will join the history department, new partnerships will emerge across campus, new bonds will be made between the university and the communities it serves, and another generation will reenvision the AWP to tackle the current questions of the future. As before, CSU leads critical conversations about the American West, from climate change and fire restoration to water resources and tribal relations.[46] Now is a moment of opportunity to bring these conversations to the fore in a reconceived AWP and put what CSU does at the center of the action in the study of the American West.

Notes

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Serving on the CSU Frontier; or, How I Spent My Summer Vacation

Derek R. Everett

Joey Bishop, the twentieth-century comedian with a perennial hangdog expression, once flirted with the idea of writing an autobiography titled *I Was a Mouse in the Rat Pack*. He rubbed shoulders with some of the most popular entertainers of his era, occasionally clowning with them onstage in Las Vegas. But he served primarily as the composer of their buffoonery, writing the jokes and skits that elicited laughs from charmed, inebriated audiences. Bishop knew his place, operating in the shadow of greats like Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and Sammy Davis, Jr. In the summer of 2002, while in graduate school, I got a taste of how the comedian must have felt, ready to pitch in however he was needed as icons of the age stood in the nearby spotlight. That season, I served as the supporting cast for scholars rather than crooners as I held the position of assistant coordinator for Colorado State University's venerable American West Program (AWP).

My love for western American history, and my desire to study it and teach it to others, long predated my arrival in Fort Collins in August 2001. Annual visits to family in central Nebraska as a child invariably included a trip to Fort Kearny, a military post on

the nineteenth-century trails, where I grew fascinated with westward expansion. An inspirational teacher in eighth grade, Ken Detweiler, further fanned the flames of my historical interest, as did a visit to Washington, D.C. with my aunt and uncle when I was eleven. By the time I was in high school, I knew that I wanted to be a history teacher, a decision reinforced by more stellar faculty including Jan Pease, Vic DeRosia, and Teresa Neal. I got a summer job as a tour guide at the Colorado State Capitol in 1997 and discovered the joy of telling stories about fascinating places and people to eager audiences. That particular outlet remains a vital part of my life, as I continue to research, write about, and give tours at the statehouse more than a quarter century later.

In the spring of 2001, as my undergraduate studies at Western State College of Colorado in chilly, beautiful Gunnison drew to a close, I focused on a career in academic history, teaching and researching at the college level. I applied to Colorado State University's history department for graduate work and joined the ranks of the Rams of the Clark Building for the fall 2001 semester. My honors program paper from Western served as the foundation for a 366-page thesis, which ultimately became my first book, *The Colorado State Capitol: History, Politics, Preservation* (2005). Thank goodness it's available at the statehouse tour desk, or I wouldn't have sold a copy in years.

When, in the spring of 2002, I was offered the position of assistant coordinator for the American West Program, I did not comprehend its history, impact, or legacy to the profession and to Colorado State University and the Fort Collins community. Nonetheless, the opportunity was appealing. I believe that there were two reasons the department asked me to serve in the post. The first was that I had earned a positive reputation both in terms of reliability and scholarship, particularly when it came to American West–related courses. During my first semester, I took an upper-division undergraduate course from John Albright covering the region's history up through the nineteenth century. John later served on my master's thesis committee and became a beloved mentor to me. I will never forget sitting in his classroom in the Clark Building on a Tuesday morning watching the 9/11 attack unfold on a television set in the corner of the room. John erased his U.S.-Mexican War outline on the chalkboard and replaced

it with the words "Watch, Learn, Think." My memories of that horrible day are softened a bit by John's wisdom and gentleness. In addition, in the spring 2002 semester I took two courses from Mark Fiege, another of the department's western historians. Those included a state and local history research seminar and an undergraduate lecture course covering the American West since 1900, essentially the sequel to John's class.

The other reason I received the summer position was, I am certain, that I was known within the history department as someone who could work effectively with the program's longtime coordinator, Harry Rosenberg. Born in 1923, Harry joined Colorado State University's faculty in 1959 and served as the first chair of the newly organized Department of History starting in 1965. When I came to campus in the fall of 2001, the powers that be had assigned me as Harry's graduate teaching assistant. I aided him in a world history survey course covering ancient times through the Renaissance, delivered in one of the cavernous A-wing lecture halls in the Clark Building. I was somewhat familiar with the subject matter from my earlier studies, but I did not consider myself especially well-versed in it. It was in that class that I met my future wife, Heather Craig, a transfer student from New England with some college courses already on her transcript. Even though I had some authority over her in Harry's class, our relationship did not develop until years later; there's no need to alert Human Resources.

Harry Rosenberg was a cross between a teddy bear and a drill sergeant. At the time he was, at seventy-eight years old, the most venerable active faculty member in the history department. Harry was a taskmaster, but his decrees and expectations always came with a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye—whether his biological one or his glass one. His age, but probably more his decades of experience in the classroom and familiarity with the subject matter, at times posed challenges. I understood comments he would make in lecture, but often the students struggled to comprehend things that Harry took for granted. Every Wednesday evening, I led a study session in a smaller C-wing classroom in the Clark Building. During those sessions, I essentially re-lectured the material that Harry had covered in the intervening days, trying to make sure that the connections so obvious to Harry were comprehensible to students. Since I composed and graded all

examinations, the cleverest students realized that coming to my study session was the best way to ensure success.

Regardless of any challenges, our students had a clear affection for Harry. His avuncular nature counteracted any frustrations they might have had. Class sessions were like listening to your grandfather tell stories for fifty minutes three mornings a week. Indeed, the morning after the 9/11 attacks, I encouraged Harry to tell the students his memories of learning about the attack on Pearl Harbor sixty years earlier, as he had discussed with me in his office that morning. I escorted him between the classroom and his office in Clark's B-wing every day, and we discussed everything from course readings to Rams football to English architecture we had visited; both Harry and I were big fans of Wells Cathedral. Even as he worked me like a plow horse, I developed a great affection for Harry, and to this day I smile at the thought or mention of his name.

Although no one around the history department said it out loud, at least not to me, I got the impression that my ability to interact successfully with Harry was both greatly appreciated and a rare development. When it came time to select a graduate student to help him coordinate the 2002 American West Program, I am sure that my name rose to the top of the list in no small part because of my rapport with Harry. At first glance, it might seem peculiar that a scholar trained in medieval history would helm the AWP, requiring him to trade western Europe for the American West. When the program was first organized in 1972, Harry had been the history department chair for seven years, not to mention the only one it had ever had. But the program did not initially reside in history. Instead, for the first several years the AWP was coordinated by faculty members from departments as diverse as Recreation Resources and Electrical Engineering. The program came under the history department's auspices in the mid-1970s, around the time that Harry stepped down as chair in 1975. Nine years later, he accepted the position as coordinator of the AWP and accomplished that task with zeal and commitment from 1984 through 2002. Harry was a child of the American West, having grown up in Utah and Southern California. He earned his doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley, and taught at Stanford University and the University of Washington before landing in Fort Collins in the fall of 1959. Although a medievalist by training, the AWP

appealed to Harry both in terms of regional affection as well as the potential to gather innovative scholars and turn them loose on an eager popular audience every summer. The town and gown concept, bringing great minds to campus to engage with a diverse local congregation, was sacred to Harry.

My connection to the AWP officially kicked off with a visit to Harry's townhouse in Fort Collins on February 21, 2002. He had called me—Harry loved the telephone and dialed my home number or the graduate student office with exhausting regularity—to ask a favor. He was falling behind in his grading for an upper-division course in early European medieval history. Harry asked if I would be able and willing to grade a few essays for a generous remuneration, and because I never learned how to say no to Harry, I agreed. I stopped by his home to collect the blue books, and Harry asked if I would be interested in serving as the assistant coordinator for the program that summer, primarily a logistical position that would enable me to rub elbows with some major intellectuals of the profession. I can't recall if I let him finish the sentence before accepting his offer.

By early May 2002, as the spring semester drew to a close, my work with the AWP commenced in earnest. Every program had a theme, and the 2002 AWP was in essence a sequel to the previous year, which had "The Outlaw" as its unifying element. In contrast to the bad boys and girls of 2001, the next year offered a return to respectability with "The Lawman." As he had almost every year for three decades, graphic artist Bob Coonts produced an arresting (pun intended) poster for "The Lawman series." A grayscale outline of a western sheriff stood on a black background, with the word "Lawman" in red capital letters along the side, as if the man with the badge was leaning on it as his reputation. I was not involved in crafting the program's theme, which had been determined the previous year, or the selection of speakers, or the design of flyers advertising the nine weeks of lectures, or any other part of the event's planning. I couldn't help but think of an anonymous poem I had seen hanging on an office wall in the Colorado State Capitol, which summed up my AWP role:

> It's not my job to run the train, the whistle I can't blow,
> It's not for me to say how far the train's allowed to go,

> I'm not allowed to blow off steam or even clang the bell,
> But let the damn thing jump the track and see who catches hell.

My job centered on making sure every aspect of the program's logistics ran smoothly. At times it was difficult to determine whether Harry Rosenberg helped or hindered that process. He took the program incredibly seriously and fretted over every aspect of it. My telephone seemed never to stop ringing in the weeks leading up to June 2002, with Harry calling to ensure I had handled one detail or another. I developed a beleaguered camaraderie with the department's secretary, Susan Jones, as we both fielded his incessant demands. She and I had clashed on occasion over the previous year, but we bonded that spring and summer while serving together in the trenches of the AWP. Much of Harry's intensity stemmed from his concern about an impending knee replacement surgery, which would put him out of commission for some time and undermine his ability to oversee the program. Harry called our offices and homes repeatedly to ensure that Susan and I had received the flyers from Citizen Printing with the program's schedule and that we had mailed them to the hundreds of recipients on the mailing list. Coordinating travel plans for speakers, their hotel accommodations, and other details inspired more calls to ensure himself that everything was on track. Apropos of Joey Bishop's mouse among rats analogy, I became known to some folks in the history department as Harry's "helper monkey."

The first of nine consecutive Tuesday evening presentations for the 2002 AWP was scheduled for June 4. The day before took a chaotic turn. In previous years, the lectures had taken place in the Plant Sciences Building, but on June 3, we received word from Facilities Management that Plant Sciences was off-limits that summer due to construction taking place on its north side. When Susan and I called Harry, recuperating at home from his May 17 knee surgery, his frustrations boiled over. For an hour and a half, we strategized with Harry and his friend Earl Hunsaker, a community member and longtime AWP supporter, to find an alternate site. Harry tossed out ideas such as the Lory Student Center ballroom, the former Fort Collins High School (now the University Center for the Arts), and a few churches in town. The Clark Building's

large lecture halls came under the purview of Conference Services during the summer to house the dozens of meetings they coordinated on campus. I contacted my friends at the Tiley House to secure permission for the use of Clark A101, with room for about five hundred people, the next day. From the phone, Harry insisted that attendees familiar with Plant Sciences would get lost trying to find another building and that they could walk around the construction site to enter Plant Sciences from the south, even though the entire building was closed off. His separation from campus made Harry irascible and complicated finding a solution. Eventually Susan, Earl, and I made the executive decision to switch to Clark and told a dubious Harry that it would all work out. We contacted the *Fort Collins Coloradoan* to insert a notice about the change of venue, and I made up some signs to lead people from Plant Sciences to neighboring Clark. Labeled "American West Program," some signs had directional arrows while others labeled the entrance doors. I mustered my artistic skills, the envy of any kindergartener, to liven up the signs with images of cacti, a desert sunset, a covered wagon, and a few other western icons.

Having weathered the lecture hall drama, the AWP's first presentation of 2002 proceeded smoothly. In addition to my last-minute signage, I stood on University Avenue outside the Plant Sciences Building to direct people. Still off his feet at home, Harry did not attend, so Earl Hunsaker emceed the event. About three hundred people gathered in Clark A101, confused about the location but eager for their annual dose of western history. Earl introduced me as someone who could answer any program-related questions, and I explained to the audience that each subsequent lecture would take place in the Chemistry Building, southwest of Clark. Its largest lecture hall, Chemistry A103, could accommodate the hundreds of people who attended the weekly events and was not booked for the summer like Clark's rooms were. Even so, the giant Periodic Table of Elements glaring down from the wall intimidated the more social science–oriented audience. It unnerved the speakers as well; every lecturer made some comment at the outset of their talk about feeling out of place in the grand chamber of science.

Not everything about that first lecture in Clark A101 on June 4 was stressful, however. I provided some comic relief for the evening when, to advertise sales of Bob Coonts's *The Lawman* poster,

I held a copy attached to a foam board in front of me and did a little dance across the stage. I suppose I looked like a can of beans with legs sticking out the bottom like in an old television commercial. It got a good laugh and seemed to distract attendees from the confusion over venue. Then the 2002 AWP commenced at last. Anne Butler of Utah State University, the first woman to edit the *Western Historical Quarterly,* delivered her talk "Behind the Badge: Western Women and Law Enforcement," which the audience enjoyed immensely. The first session wrapped up on an enthusiastic note, and regarding my dance, Dr. Butler told me that if history didn't work out, I had a great career ahead in vaudeville.

Some of the 2002 AWP presentations challenged a prejudice fostered in me by a few of my professors to that point—a dismissal of nonacademic historians and the assumption that their contributions paled in comparison to "real" historians who had letters after their names and were toiling at universities. Artist Thom Ross, for example, offered the lecture "The Western Lawman as Art" on June 11. Ross really knew his stuff. The following week, on June 18, the campus hosted author and University of Texas, El Paso, archivist Leon Metz, who discussed the career of iconic western lawman Pat Garrett. On July 2, Chip Carlson embodied the infamous Wyomingite Tom Horn, and on July 23, Michael Koury discussed the Colorado career of Bat Masterson. At first, these non-academic events left me grousing "so what?" as I had been trained to ask, but the AWP experience challenged that prejudice. The fact that the crowd ate up the talks by Ross, Metz, Carlson, and Koury offered me a lesson that just because something didn't appeal to me didn't mean that it couldn't or shouldn't appeal to anyone.

By Metz's lecture on June 18, a sense of normality descended upon the series as Harry Rosenberg returned. To many attendees—hundreds of people of all ages attended weekly—Harry was as much a draw as the featured speakers. His partner, Nancy Hart—who became the widower's second wife in a Wisconsin wedding that August—parked their car in a handicapped spot at the Education Building. Armed with a cane, he made his way into Chemistry A103, where the audience welcomed him with enthusiastic applause. Harry thanked the crowd for navigating the room changes and for their ongoing support of the program, letting his affection for the town and gown event shine through. His

enthusiastic return to the fold contrasted with a concern inescapable to Coloradans that summer, however. A crisis literally hanging over the 2002 AWP involved wildfires burning across Colorado and the American West. As the drought that has plagued the region ever since settled in, the lack of moisture combined with lightning strikes or careless campfires or cigarettes to set vast tracts ablaze. The hundreds of people who gathered weekly on campus passed the time waiting for the lecture by discussing the drought and infernos, including the Coal Seam, Missionary Ridge, and Hayman fires, the latter the largest in Colorado's recorded history until the Cameron Peak fire in 2020 consumed more than twelve percent of Larimer County. Climate change and environmental history, appropriately, have emerged as centerpieces of the resurrected AWP in recent years.

Reflecting my pro-academic historian bias, I most eagerly anticipated the 2002 AWP lectures delivered by university professors, especially those whose books I had read for class or my own interest. Michael Tate of the University of Nebraska, Omaha, delivered the compelling talk "Posse Comitatus in Blue: The Soldier as Frontier Lawman" on June 25, and afterward we chatted about my much-loved historic site, Fort Kearny. On July 16, Richard Brown of the University of Oregon inspired some grumbles from the attendees when he read verbatim his presentation on vigilantism in nineteenth-century Montana and Wyoming in a monotone without any slides or other visual aids, which the sizeable congregation had come to expect. One of the best experiences of my summer service as the assistant coordinator took place a week earlier on July 9, when the retired chief historian of the National Park Service, Robert Utley, came to town. He was one of the most impactful scholars of his generation, and his work drew on academic research but could appeal to anyone; I awaited his presentation eagerly. Utley's lack of a doctorate (he earned a master's degree from Indiana University, though) further challenged my prejudice against nonacademic historians and helped to undermine that embarrassing character flaw of mine. That day, Harry Rosenberg invited me to lunch at Café Bluebird, north of campus, with him, Utley, John Albright, Mark Fiege, and Ruth Alexander, then the history department's chair. That evening, Utley's famously weak hearing required me to relay audience questions to him, while he

bellowed responses at a volume everyone in the crowd could hear. Utley's presentation, "The Texas Rangers in History and Legend," drew on his most recent publication and reflected the AWP's ability to promote the freshest western scholarship.

The final session of the 2002 series featured Patricia Nelson Limerick of the University of Colorado. As a graduate student focused on the American West, meeting Patty that summer felt like an aspiring musician shaking hands with Elvis, Springsteen, Beyonce—or, in my case, Sinatra. The scholar most associated with New Western History, which introduced the "holy trinity" of race, class, and gender to the region's studies and emphasized the controversies of conquest rather than the glories of Manifest Destiny, Patty served as the exclamation point on The Lawman series. Her talk on July 30, "Judging Colorado: The Role of the Courts in the Changing West," proved the most popular of the season. More than three hundred people attended Patty's presentation in Chemistry A103, filling the space to standing room only. My strongest memory of Patty's performance that summer evening had less to do with what she had to say and more with how she said it. I marveled at her ability to speak at lightning speed without taking a breath, as if her superhuman pulmonary capabilities reflected her peerless ability to reorient the study of the American West. This humble graduate student felt honored simply to be in Patty's presence. She held the audience in rapt fascination as she described Colorado legal institutions in the late nineteenth century, invigorating what could have been a rather dry subject. The eager applause at the end of Patty's talk reflected not only the audience's delight at her presentation but also their appreciation of the American West Program's offerings in the engaging, thoughtful summer of 2002.

July 30's culminating lecture proved bittersweet, ending nine hectic weeks with a bang and a whimper alike. I noted that evening in my personal journal—from which I drew most of this essay—that the summer thus far had been "a rather enjoyable one if a bit exhausting," a fine bit of understatement. Before Patty's talk, Harry Rosenberg took me aside and told me in confidence that he had informed the powers that be of his intention to retire before the fall 2002 semester. Part of me felt relieved that I might have the chance to be a teaching assistant for someone less challenging that semester, an unfulfilled wish as it turned out, but that's another

story. Nonetheless, I couldn't help feeling sad as Harry prepared to depart Colorado State University. After the lecture, he invited me to join a celebratory dinner at his favorite Fort Collins eatery, the Moot House. Harry, Patty, her husband, Jeff Limerick, and Rheba Massey, the doyenne of Fort Collins history, shared a table and a delightful conversation with me as we toasted another successful year of the AWP. We talked about the West's brutal drought that year (and every year since), the merits and defects of recent secretaries of the interior, and Patty's forthcoming visit to the White House for an event honoring western women writers. In subsequent years, whenever I returned to Fort Collins to visit Harry, he invariably suggested sharing a meal at the Moot House, capped with his favorite treat, crème brûlée, and who was I to refuse such an invitation? To this day, and especially after Harry's death in 2010, any time I sit down to eat in the Moot House's English pub–style bar, I think of my dear, demanding friend, and I smile.

Serving as the AWP assistant coordinator in the summer of 2002 remains one of my proudest, most cherished memories from my master's degree work at Colorado State University. It introduced me to some wonderful people and brilliant minds and challenged my preconceptions about what a historian could be. My struggle over academic versus "buff" history reflected a contemporary debate within the Western History Association (WHA), the preeminent organization of the field. Unfortunately, the amateur storytellers have mostly been purged from the WHA in favor of credentialed academics. I understand the appeal of professionalization, but the loss of the "buffs" has neutered the WHA, rendering it less dynamic than in its greener decades. The blend of both styles in the AWP ensured a tapestry of perspectives and interpretations, enriching me and the hundreds of people who filled the lecture hall every week. Before my friend and history department colleague Leisl Carr Childers asked me to participate in the program's semicentennial commemoration, the AWP lived on in my life most prominently in Bob Coonts's posters from 2001 (a gift from Harry) and 2002, which hang in my personal office, artistic bookends of an outlaw and a lawman. Like Joey Bishop, I may have been a second banana (if not even lower ranked than that), but all that mattered was that I got to share the stage with icons.

It is a dubious coincidence that the 2002 American West Program, for which I toiled as the assistant coordinator, marked the end of an era. Harry's retirement coincided with the end of years of generous financial support for the program from Colorado State University. Anne Bond, a history department lecturer and curator at the Colorado Historical Society, coordinated a program of five speakers in 2003, although attendees had to pay twenty-five dollars for the series or seven dollars per talk. With the subsidy's end and a fee for the AWP for the first time, attendance plummeted. The program has witnessed resurrections of varying scales since then, but 2002 unintentionally served as its climax. In retrospect, the AWP has been one of the most successful outreach efforts the campus has offered to connect cutting-edge scholarship and engaging storytellers with CSU's neighbors. The fascination with western American history endures, the local congregation awaits, and with sufficient support from the powers that be, the American West Program could and should enjoy a well-deserved and long-awaited renaissance.

Vine Deloria Jr. and the American West Program

Philip J. Deloria

When I left Colorado for New Haven in the late summer of 1988, I carried with me a small collection of books that I thought might be of use as I entered Yale University's graduate program in western American history. At the top of that stack was an edited collection, *The Plains Indians of the Twentieth Century,* edited by Peter Iverson only a few years earlier, and rich with landmark essays by critically important historians. Fred Hoxie's "From Prison to Homeland: The Cheyenne River Reservation before World War I" was my favorite, but there were many more: Norris Hundley on the *Winters* decision, Tom Holm on Indian military participation in World War II, Michael Lawson on the Pick-Sloan plan, Loretta Fowler on the political economy of the Wind River reservation, Don Fixico on energy development, as well as old scholarly hands like Donald Berthrong,

William Hagen, and Peter Powell.[1] Many of these chapters stood on their own; others would soon become books. I marked up and dog-eared Iverson's collection and let its twentieth-century focus drive my first research interests. Nor was I alone, as the field of Native American studies turned, with increasing insistence in the years that followed, toward an excavation of the twentieth century, an effort that continues to this day.

Then, as now (and in this essay), I sometimes found myself echoing, elaborating, or otherwise revisiting the work of my father, Vine Deloria Jr. Nor was I alone in that, either. For as Iverson observed, *The Plains Indians of the Twentieth Century* was itself a response to one of his critiques. "In 1974," wrote Iverson,

> Vine Deloria, Jr., issued a challenge to historians to begin the study in greater detail of Indian life in the twentieth century. Speaking to an audience in Fort Collins, Colorado, he suggested in vintage fashion that historians were mired in the previous century. Deloria said that rather than rehashing what Lewis and Clark had for breakfast on the Bitterroot in 1804 or reliving Little Big Horn once again, we need to discover what has happened to Indians since the passing of the frontier.[2]

Deloria's challenge—shaped by the Red Power movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s—captured his pragmatic understanding of the critical relation between Indian politics and the narrative structures of American history. But the occasion, and that unmarked "audience in Fort Collins," also reveals a genealogy deeply embedded in Colorado State University's American West Program, an ambitious effort to gather annually an array of perspectives on issues relevant to the West.[3] The 1974 iteration of the Program was its third, a summer's worth of classes, lectures, films, art, informal "campfire conversations," a bit of rodeo, and a focused conference titled "Viewpoints in Indian History." The conference aimed to craft a dialogue between Native and non-Native historians concerning the uses and abuses of *History,* as practiced on and about Native peoples—and perhaps *for, by, and with* them. In that sense, the meeting was a harbinger of what would soon come to be called "the New Indian History," a reorientation that

sought to transform complacent American narrative structures, analytical strategies, and evidentiary canons, while also aiming to expose the ideological interests that lurked beneath notions of historical objectivity.

We can know something about that 1974 conference because the papers and talks were published in the intriguingly titled volume *Red Men and Hat Wearers,* edited by Daniel Tyler, a key faculty member in Colorado State's western initiative.[4] Indeed, in one of my early forays into Yale's Sterling Library, browsing through Library of Congress heading E77.R, the book's title grabbed me and would not let go. I checked it out and brought it home. There, I discovered a collection of essays primarily rooted in the nineteenth century—thus the direct inspiration for my father's demand that historians take up the twentieth. And, as Henry Fritz would suggest in a review of *Red Men and Hat Wearers,* the non-Native writers didn't quite get around to engaging the question of history and its uses. Presenters instead centered the meeting on questions of how white attitudes toward Indians—and Indian attitudes toward whites—had changed over time. Fritz took the misalignment as evidence that white and Indian views on history were indeed polarized—and perhaps ready for a rethinking.[5]

Whatever the differences of opinion may have been, the organizing question itself, as Tyler observed in his introduction to the collection, had first been posed at Colorado State's inaugural American West Program in 1972, when Clyde Dollar, a non-Native historian and archeologist, proposed a culturally relativist view of historical epistemology.[6] Dollar relied upon a metaphor based on Alice's journey through the looking glass. A non-Native historian might view the past through one side of the glass and see evidence, method, fact, *history*. But pass through the glass to a Native view, Dollar argued, and you would see differently, through the lens of storytelling and mythmaking. There, in an Indian world, "history" served as "entertainment" or as cultural authority. The status of the "fact," he suggested, was something conveyed by Indian elders, and it was not only that the fact was unquestionable, but that there was nothing useful about even asking whether it *could* be questioned. This suggested that Native cultures had unique epistemologies, distinct ways of knowing the world. If so, then it raised real questions about the politics of knowledge and

about commensurability—about whether Native and non-Native cultures were so different as to defy easy comparison and mutual intelligibility.

Organizers hoped that Dollar's provocation concerning Native perspectives on history would serve as an organizing principle for the 1974 conference. Today, we can understand such questions in even larger terms, as central to what was at that time the emergent field of Native American studies. Over the last five decades, Native Studies scholars have worked through their own articulations of Dollar's "looking glass" argument. Some have questioned the use of colonialist archives and sought to privilege oral history and tradition. Others have insisted on an understanding of language as a distinct key to culture and for the essential quality of linguistic study in historical analysis. Native history has had its moments of community-based study, ethnohistorical engagements with anthropology, and fights over tribal authority, authorial identity, and mixed-bloodedness. The field has watched the old synthetic structures of the 1960s and '70s—American "images" of Indians, for instance, or federal policy—disintegrate and then be renewed as synthetic ambitions took flight around settler colonial theory. It has debated whether Native American history was a discipline or an interdiscipline, and it has engaged ideas concerning the Fourth World and emergence of a global Indigenous.

Many of these debates have rested on questions of if and how Indian histories are knowable. To whom? What does historicity look like in Indigenous terms? What kinds of conceptual sharing and interchange have shaped understandings of the past in both Native and non-Native communities? To what extent is the past inevitably the grounds for political struggle, and what kinds of knowledge politics might one take up—or reject? What is gained or lost when one maps non-Native conceptual categories onto Native peoples and their pasts? When should tribal history stay tribal? It is fair to say that the American West Program was an early venue for framing a critical set of questions and debates that continue to structure the practice of Native American and Indigenous studies to the present.

Indeed, I think we might widen the lens even more and find even broader connections and relevance. When one looks through the old programs, those early years of the American West Program can

look like a gathering of regionalists trying to make sense of their place—and that is true. It is striking to see the robust engagement with the changing resource economies of Colorado, the burgeoning environmental movement, and critical political figures such as Richard Lamm and Gary Hart. But it is also the case that the early years of American West Program can be seen as emblematic of the intellectual environment of that unique moment, eager to embrace issues of epistemic difference, narrative fallibility, and incommensurate historicities. Perhaps the crew assembled in Fort Collins had not been gathering to read passed-around photocopies of the latest Clifford Geertz essays, but they must have been breathing the same air and water that would produce *The Interpretation of Cultures* in 1973.[7] Likewise, Dollar's critique and Tyler's willingness to take it up placed them in the company of thinkers like Hayden White, whose *Metahistory* would also appear in 1973, and raised fundamental questions about the narrative structures of history and its claims to facticity.[8] Alternatively, one might view those gathered in Fort Collins as historians engaging the field of ethnohistory at a crucial moment, as it turned from the applied work of the Indian Claims Commission to a more robust claim on scholarly authority.[9] Or we might see in the discussion the long shadow of postcolonial critique: the early 1970s split the difference between the established works of Franz Fanon and the cusp-of-emergent Orientalism of Edward Said, published in 1978.[10]

The early gatherings of the American West Program also took place in the wake of Native writers such as D'Arcy McNickle and N. Scott Momaday, the public-facing cultural politics of the American Indian Movement and other Red Power groups, and the founding of Native American Studies at the University of Minnesota, San Francisco State, and the University of California, Berkeley.[11] There can be no doubt that Vine Deloria Jr.'s writings had helped shape that moment and would continue to influence the developments of the decades that followed. When he rose to offer the banquet speech at the 1974 conference, he was coming off a rather extraordinary run of books: *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969), *We Talk, You Listen* (1970), *God Is Red* (1973), and *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties* (1974). In a recent intellectual biography, American Indian studies scholar David Martinez has pointed to these as a "Deloria Tetralogy," four books critical to

my father's early oeuvre.[12] I think it helpful to include two additional books—*Of Utmost Good Faith* (1971) and *Red Man in the New World Drama Revisited* (1971)—expanding Martinez's frame to a *hexalogy* or perhaps an even larger canon, given my father's rather extensive writing across genres that included articles, reviews, introductions, essays, and more. Central to so many of these pieces was his sense that he needed to begin each with an effort to undo ideological mythmaking and offer instead new historical narratives that would explain the contemporary situation to curious non-Native readers.

My father always understood that the root of political and legal change lay in *cultural* attitudes, an anthropological position perhaps drawn from his aunt Ella Deloria, who was highly sensitized to the place of history in cultural politics. *Custer Died for Your Sins* and *We Talk, You Listen* both begin with a critique not simply of stereotypes, but of the historical master narratives that cling to Indian people and underpin America's sense of itself.[13] The frequently forgotten *Of Utmost Good Faith* seems a straightforward collection of documents relevant to Native history and politics, but each text is framed as an opportunity to engage the past from a Native perspective.[14] The publisher, Straight Arrow Press, sold it as a trade book, suggesting that at least one market analysis had revealed a general audience willing to dig into primary sources as a route into a new history. Perhaps even more striking was my father's mysterious decision to rewrite and update the Jennings Wise tome *Red Man in the New World Drama*, a stodgy, obscure 1931 book that had never been—and is still not—part of the canon of writing about Indian issues. I think that he thought the book was valuable not as a critique (he had already done that), but as a *counter-narrative* that consistently centered Indian agency and revealed colonial dominations, cheats, lies, and brutality. That book is in the popular tradition of Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1970), and one imagines what might have been if *Red Man in the New World Drama,* rather than Brown's book, had become the era-defining bestseller that shaped popular opinion and the market for Native writing.[15]

My father's political agenda had developed over time, from critiques of American colonial institutions in *Custer Died for Your*

Sins to a treaty-based argument for Native sovereignty in *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties*. As he reminded the 1974 conference, the stories most detrimental to those agendas were those of writers like Dee Brown, common, public, ideological histories that celebrated the nineteenth century. Such books could only evoke the past, reaffirm non-Native stereotypes, and distract from the pressing politics of the moment.[16] As my father urged the *Viewpoints in Indian History* participants, the history that *really* mattered, in the then-and-there of the early 1970s, was almost untold and unthinkable: that of the post–World War I period to the present. Knowing that story—of the Indian Citizenship Act, the Indian Reorganization Act, and the Termination Era—was essential to understanding the Red Power movement, the legal activism, the argument for treaties, and the demand for sovereignty and self-determination so much a part of the 1970s. In that sense, he insisted on elevating the relation between history and politics, taking a Native-centric approach to both, and thus framing one of the agendas for the New Indian History. Because the conference presenters had skirted Clyde Dollar's question, he was able to skirt it as well, to focus attention on the politics of history as it was told and experienced by non-Native people.

One might have anticipated that he would continue with that agenda when he appeared at the 1976 American West Program two years later. Indeed, it would have been completely logical for him to take up the centennial-bicentennial theme of that meeting and ask participants to put Indian peoples at the center of Colorado's 100-year history. The centennial celebrations were surely on his mind, for he was serving on the state bi/centennial commission and was deeply familiar (and perhaps a little frustrated) with its various plans and discussions. But he did nothing of the kind.

Instead, he turned to his 1973 book, *God Is Red*, taking up an argument that points listeners to a different angle on those foundational questions about epistemology, historicity, and commensurability, all of which continued to linger from earlier years.[17] *God Is Red* advanced a complex claim that Western (primarily Christian) and Indigenous North American views of time and history and space and place were essentially incommensurable—but that non-Natives could both protect Native practices *and* learn from them. Spirituality in North America, he insisted, could never be

energized or actualized by an imperialistic global Christian evangelicalism, necessarily disconnected from the far-off places that had originally given Christianity its meaning and power. Rather, real spiritual power and meaning in North America could only arise from sacred places that were *here*. And those were Native places and practices, leading him to conclude that, "for this land, God is red." As with his earlier argument, however, he left room for non-Native people and specifically for working together in response to environmental crises, framed differently in the 1970s than today but continuously visible over the last five decades. It was not only that God was red, he suggested, but that all people needed to mobilize "for this land."

As my father would later admit, he had been surprised by the lack of traction garnered by *God Is Red* among the reading public, and it may be that he wanted to make the arguments one more time. Or perhaps he saw the book extending a theoretical continuity across the first five years of the American West Program. Rather than offering "the twentieth century" as a response to the intellectual currents of the early Program meetings, he wished, this time around, to assert *God Is Red* as a way of thinking about tribal and non-tribal historicity and commensurability. His motives are not knowable. But such speculations can help us make sense of the nature of his own thinking during that moment and the ways his thought continued to help shape the field of Native American Studies.

Sovereignty, treaties, and self-determination proved central to my father's writings in the period between 1969 and 1974 (and indeed, the first edition of *God Is Red* contains not only the Trail of Broken Treaties' famous "Twenty Points" document, which insisted on a return to governance through treaty, but also the government response to the Twenty Points and a Native rebuttal, which surely renders the book nothing if not political). By 1976, however, he was well into another transition, visible through *God Is Red*. In that book, he knitted together the decade-old religious studies literature he had accumulated while a divinity student at the Lutheran Theological Seminary with the critique of Christianity he had been forming for years as he watched the Episcopal Church—a longtime mainstay in the family—flailing and failing in its efforts to serve Indian people. *God Is Red* consolidated his critique (there is real anger visible in the book, particularly when it

comes to the works of institutional Christianity) even as it leaned into a theologically essentialist assertion of the power of Native spiritualities. It pointed toward the thinking, redolent with ontological and epistemological questions, that would take shape in his 1979 book, *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence*.[18]

In that sense, these two talks at Colorado State University helped shape two cornerstone arguments about the nature of Native American Studies, one focused on the cultural politics of sovereignty relative to American historical narrative; the other on a demand for non-Native recognition of and support for the distinctive and incommensurable nature of Indigenous spirituality, inseparable from the land itself. When in 1978 he took up his first serious academic appointment, at the University of Arizona, he worked to build a program that trained students in the world of law and politics, treaties and sovereignty, even as he continued to insist on the power of spirituality, philosophy, and community.

In 1997, Dakota scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn published a bracing critique of the field, *Who Stole Native American Studies?*[19] In it, she offered an origin story of her own, situated at the same historical moment as that of the American West Program. Her foundational conference was the 1970 American Indian Scholars Convocation at Princeton, and her iconic publications were Alphonso Ortiz's 1969 book, *The Tewa World: Space, Time, Being and Becoming in a Pueblo Society,* and N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize–winning *House Made of Dawn* (1968). More to the point, Cook-Lynn insisted that the field had been founded on two distinct anchor points: sovereignty and indigenousness. In the essay, she would go on to posit a series of institutional and intellectual decisions that had compromised these goals. What matters in this story is less the critique—generative though it has been—and more the sense that what my father was articulating in 1974 was surely a historical and cultural politics designed to advance American Indian *sovereignty,* and in 1976 an equally insistent demand for a recognition of *indigenousness,* a tribal core that was spiritual, to be sure, but also philosophical, epistemological, ontological, and cultural—unable to be reduced to western categories but essential to Native life and futurity. On these things, two Native scholars coming from quite different intellectual positions and histories decisively agreed.

Today, I am one of many teachers who continue to introduce the field of Native American and Indigenous Studies with a reading of Cook-Lynn's essay and who build pedagogical and intellectual structures around "sovereignty" and "indigenousness." As I do so, I am reminded of the ways that, from the vantage point of the late 1990s, Cook-Lynn was able to extract a measure of clarity from the murkiness so much a part of the early 1970s. For Cook-Lynn, that clarity was hard won: its visibility stemmed, in part, from the institutional and personal betrayals of those concepts she—and the field—held dear. Things were less clear but no less important when my father joined the American West Program in 1974 and 1976.

Looking back at the various historiographic twists and turns of the last five decades, one can see how sovereignty and Indigenousness—and the challenges around commensurability and the politics of culture and of knowledge production—continue to structure the field of Native American and Indigenous studies. We work to read distinctive "tribalography" and to take seriously culturally based literary nationalism. We try to understand the adaptive, canny Indigenous essentialisms and engagements that characterize Gerald Vizenor's quirkily persistent framing of "survivance." Community-responsive work has emerged as an essential component, as *history* and other forms of scholarship have deemphasized narratives "about" Native peoples and instead are practiced *by, with, and for* them. Peter Iverson's contributors were almost uniformly men; today, women—and often Native women—are as likely to be taking the lead. As we've watched African American studies explore the histories of wealth produced through slavery, Native Studies has engaged its own complex legacies of enslavement and unfreedom, while also generating an exciting cluster of scholars exploring what Emilie Connolly has named "fiduciary colonialism."[20] As scholars have established intellectual relations with Indigenous counterparts from around the globe, we've developed analyses that are not only comparative, but also connective, revealing untold histories of movement across the planet. With new legal, political, and economic possibilities unfolding in Indian Country, Native American history is constantly seeking ways to research and write in dialogue with tribal sovereignty. And as ecological catastrophe looms amid the

crises of late capitalism, Native intellectual work has spread far outside the bounds of universities into media, resource management, environmental policy, energy and climate, and so much more.

When I finished my graduate training, with Peter Iverson's book still on my shelf and *Red Men and Hat Wearers* safely returned to Sterling Library, I found (like so many other students of my generation) that I had been situated at the triangulation of three fields: the American West, environmental history, and American Indian Studies. Those fields came together in distinct configurations in different locations, among different scholars and students. The proportions of one or the other might vary depending on whether one was in Colorado, Connecticut, Kansas, Wisconsin, Washington, New Mexico, California, or elsewhere. What emerged as a fundamental premise, however, was the indispensability of a new and transformed engagement with Native peoples and Native histories. That premise came out of the demands of the Red Power era, to be sure, and later, out of the new assertions of tribal sovereignty. But it also came out of the many gatherings, conversations, papers, challenges, collections, articles, and happenings of those years, each seeking to chart new ways of thinking in the critical cultural moment of the early 1970s. The American West Program at Colorado State University was one such effort—a creative blend of happening and academic program—and it is well worth remembering and celebrating its generative power and its lasting legacy.

Notes

1. Peter Iverson, *The Plains Indians of the Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985).
2. Iverson, *Plains Indians,* v.
3. See Leisl Carr Childers's incredibly useful timeline of the AWP, which I've drawn upon in thinking through the early history of the program. https://leislcarrchilders.org/american-west-program/.
4. Daniel Tyler, ed., *Red Men and Hat-Wearers: Viewpoints in Indian History* (Boulder: Pruett Pub. Co., 1976).
5. Henry E. Fritz, "*Red Men and Hat-Wearers,*" *Journal of American History*. 66, no. 2 (September 1979): 360-61.

6. Tyler, *Red Men and Hat Wearers,* 1-4.
7. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). On the photocopied copies passed around, see Jean-Christophe Agnew, "History and Anthropology: Scenes from a Marriage," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 3, no. 2 (1990): 29-50, esp. 30.
8. Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).
9. See, for example, P.T. Strong, "Ethnohistory," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Science,* ed. James D. Wright, 2nd ed., vol. 8 (New York: Elsevier, 2015), 192-97. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.12191-9.
10. Frantz Fanon, Richard Philcox, Jean-Paul Sartre, Homi K. Bhabha, and Cornel West, *The Wretched of the Earth*. 60th anniversary ed. (New York: Grove Press, 2021); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism,* 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
11. N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); D'Arcy McNickle, *Native American Tribalism: Indian Survivals and Renewals* (New York: Published for the Institute of Race Relations by Oxford University Press, 1973).
12. David Martinez, *Life of the Indigenous Mind: Vine Deloria Jr. and the Birth of the Red Power Movement* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press and American Philosophical Society, 2019).
13. Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Avon, 1970); Vine Deloria, *We Talk, You Listen: New Tribes, New Turf* (New York: Macmillan, 1970).
14. Vine Deloria, *Of Utmost Good Faith* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books,1971).
15. Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971); Jennings C. Wise and Vine Deloria, *The Red Man in the New World Drama: A Politico-Legal Study with a Pageantry of American Indian History* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).
16. Vine Deloria, "The Twentieth Century," in *Red Men and Hat Wearers,* 155-66.
17. Vine Deloria, *God Is Red* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1973).

18. Vine Deloria, *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).
19. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, "Who Stole Native American Studies?" *Wicazo Sa Review* 12, no. 1 (1997): 9–28. https://doi.org/10.2307/1409161.
20. Emilie Connolly, "Fiduciary Colonialism," *American Historical Review*. 127, no. 1 (2022): 223–53. https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhac012.

Bob Coonts: An Artist of the American West

Ariel Schnee

An internationally recognized artist whose work has been featured throughout the world, Bob Coonts achieved success as an artist having forgotten neither where he came from nor what he loves: the land, culture, and history of the American West. In his adopted hometown of Fort Collins, Colorado, Coonts's most beloved works are a poster series designed for a long-running, public-facing program at Colorado State University: the American West Program. In a popular poster series (1972–78 and 1984–2002) that represented the program's visual brand, the program's leadership team of academics and community members gave Coonts an outlet to unleash his creative imagination on the subject of his beloved American West. His body of work was a charismatic ambassador to the general public for the academic and cultural conversations that the American West Program facilitated during its heyday. The freedom to design whatever appealed

to him resulted in a series of artworks that were personal reflections but also instantly relatable to anyone who lived or spent time in the American West. That sense of intimacy and familiarity—or as Coonts terms it, a "remembering quality"—came from Coonts's lived experience moving between the West's natural, urban, and rural spaces, augmented by his training in graphic design (then called commercial art) at a land grant university.[1] When his life is placed into context with his works, the images themselves become his biography, relaying the story of his life as an artist of the American West.

Coonts's intimacy with western environments is an unmistakable feature of the American West Program poster series. Coonts's parents, Delbia Kinley Coonts and Minnie Elizabeth Smith, were natives of eastern Colorado; their families before them were farmers on the plains. Coonts's parents married in 1934 and, following family tradition, began a farm of their own. The Dust Bowl followed his parents to the Colorado plains. Over fifty years later, in 1985, Coonts interviewed his parents and one of their friends to prepare himself to design *Dust Bowl Days: The Winds of Change in the West*. The design was one of the darkest of the American West Program series, featuring a farmhouse, wire fence, and windmill on a desolate farmstead. Skeletal, leafless trees spike skyward in the background. An ominous dust cloud rolls toward the viewer, dwarfing the rest of the image. The stark design came from Coonts's parents' description of their experience of the Dust Bowl. Coonts recalled his parents telling him about their struggles during that time: "The horses they owned were eating each other's manes and tails. Cows were eating soap weeds and foaming at the mouth because of their ingesting it. In the house, Mom would have to light kerosene lamps at midday."[2] In the image he created, Coonts layered visual references to his family's experience of the Dust Bowl—the farmhouse in the image is based on the home his parents were forced to abandon on the Colorado plains.

In *Dust Bowl Days,* Coonts counterbalanced a desolate landscape with a symbol of the resilience of Dust Bowl–era farmers like his parents. He added two bright lines of magenta and orange to the horizon to give the scene the hopeful message that a new dawn was breaking. After a stint working on an Idaho dairy farm, Coonts's parents returned to Colorado and established another

farm near Simla, where they began their family. The family moved around, ending up near Agate, Colorado. By the age of six, Coonts was free to roam the plains on his beloved horse, Lightfoot, with his .22 rifle in hand. As they grew, he and his brother, Eddie Ray, continued to explore the wonders of the natural world around them. Coonts recalled spending time thinking about "what life must have been like for those that came before us" and hunting arrowheads with his father. As an adult, Coonts recalled his early childhood on unelectrified, "dirt poor farms" with no running water as very hard work but also as a very happy time.[3]

The family's unflagging hope for the future did not outweigh their vulnerability to the natural environment. Their later attempts at farming were more successful than their first—the Coonts family raised wheat and other crops and had a small ranching and dairying operation selling beef, milk, and cream. Coonts's mother raised chickens and sold meat and eggs, ordering chicks from the Montgomery Ward catalogue.[4] However, the family could not stay on the land permanently. As Coonts recalled:

> The last two years on the farm, we had what would be considered "bumper" wheat crops. Both years, right before combining, hail wiped us out. We went up to the field the next morning, and I remember my dad and mom standing on the edge of the field and crying. This was the first time I had seen my dad cry.[5]

The family sold their possessions to pay off their loans and moved to Limon, Colorado. His parents adopted wage labor. His father worked in carpentry, building a hotel. The partially completed hotel was the family's home for several months before they rented a small house—Coonts and his brother lived in one room, and his parents stayed in an adjoining room. His mother painted houses. She later became a cook for the local high school where Coonts and his brother were students and then worked in a five-and-dime store. His father eventually changed jobs, working at a sheet metal company that he later bought and operated.[6]

Even after the family's move to a more populated area of Colorado, none of the schools Coonts attended offered art classes, leaving him to seek out art from the few sources accessible to a child in rural Colorado. "I was teaching myself," Coonts recollected,

"because I had no one to teach me."[7] By the time he arrived in Limon in the eighth grade, he had never visited an art museum.[8] His father was talented at drawing flying birds and horses, and his elementary school teachers occasionally assigned craft projects. However, most of Coonts's early experiences with art came from newspapers, comic strips, and magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post,* especially the lavish covers created by Norman Rockwell and other famous illustrators. At the age of eleven, he saw a spread in a 1947 issue of *Life* magazine of Jackson Pollock's work and remembered drawing very different conclusions about Pollock's art than did the older people around him. Looking back on that experience, Coonts remarked, "I was in awe of the work. . . . I remember showing my dad and mom, my aunt and uncle. And they all laughed and said, 'What's the world coming to?' Because of their backgrounds and education, or lack thereof, about art. . . . But there was something working, I think, a spark."[9] As a young person from an agricultural family, Coonts struggled to see himself as anything more than an appreciative audience for the talents of professional artists and illustrators.

Coonts's love for iconic works of popular midcentury art remained a lifelong source of inspiration; he paid homage to the images and artists he enjoyed as a child by reinterpreting them in the American West Program poster series. The arrangement of images for the 1996 American West Program poster, *The West Beckoned,* was inspired by Norman Rockwell's 1943 work *The Freedom of Worship*. The final work in Rockwell's famous *Four Freedoms* series, the painting honors the right of Americans to free worship with a grouping of people of different faiths praying together.[10] Coonts's secular version represented a similar grouping of people of different ethnicities who immigrated to the American West at various points in history. The work of another of Coonts's early art heroes, Fred Harman, inspired *Trails to Rails: Trails West, 1869–1929*. The illustrator of the popular western cartoon strip *Red Ryder and Little Beaver,* Harman was a contemporary and classmate of Walt Disney. "I used to spend time as a kid," Coonts said, "trying to draw from Fred's cartoon strip in the Sunday funny papers. I hand drew this poster and it was similar to Fred Harman's style."[11] A vibrant image of a locomotive speeding along a precarious mountain railway, the poster is a striking visual

straight out of classic western iconography. The bold colors of the piece, including rich greens, bright yellows, red, and pink, echoed the vivid hues of Harman's comics.

In high school, Coonts's interest in art continued to develop, but the thought that he might pursue art professionally was still remote. As a junior, Coonts admired one of his friends, Jack Richardson, the art editor of his school newspaper. "He could, in my mind," Coonts said, "really draw or cartoon, so he had a comic strip in the school newspaper."[12] Coonts signed up for a cartooning correspondence course in order to improve his drawing skills, but "it looked boring and uninteresting to [him] at the time." He quickly gave up on the course but continued to draw and sketch in his school notebooks. By high school, he was entirely self-taught and had still never received a formal art lesson.[13] The following year, Coonts, by then a senior, took on Richardson's role as art editor "primarily because no one else wanted the job," and he began working with basic cut-and-paste techniques, learning to assemble newspaper layouts and work with typography.

In addition, Coonts pursued athletics, including basketball and football. Sports offered the clearest and easiest path to his goal of higher education. At the time, it was still common for rural children to leave school after eighth grade to work on their families' farms. A college education was a rarity.[14] A football injury during the final game of his senior year derailed Coonts's dreams of attending college. Weeks after sustaining the injury on the field, Coonts received treatment at a hospital in Simla. There, his doctors informed him that he had broken his neck on the field and that the injury easily could have killed him. He spent three months in a neck brace. He never played football again.

Without a sports scholarship or a clear plan for his education, his family could not justify the cost of sending him to college. Coonts set his educational ambitions aside.[15] He returned to manual work outdoors, which again placed him in proximity to the West's harsh climate.[16] Coonts recounted one of his experiences working with a state highway maintenance crew:

> In the winter, January of 1955, we . . . had a huge blizzard that paralyzed that part of the state for a time. Myself and another kid, a friend out of high school, were assigned a

> stretch of highway to plow and shovel cinders onto the highway. . . . We were driving an old 1926 Coleman snowplow that did not have a heater. The only heat was off the motor if we were moving. It only had one windshield wiper and that had to be worked by hand. So one of us would drive and the other guy would work the windshield wiper, back and forth. . . . We did this for forty-eight hours. The only sleep we got was when one guy was driving, and the snow wasn't too bad, and we didn't have to work the wipers. Then, we could catch a few winks.[17]

A solitary, wakeful vision of a snowbound Colorado town at night appeared in Coonts's design for the 1990 program poster *The Frontier Town: Builders and Boosters*. Inspired by the false-fronted main streets of western films as well as the historic appearance of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century frontier towns, Coonts created a simple hand-drawn rendering of a small town's colorful main street with yellow-lit windows, the scene blanketed by a deep blue sky and shadowed by tall mountains.[18]

After his wintertime experience in road maintenance, Coonts decided that he wanted neither a career on the highway crew nor on the farm. After completing boot camp for the United States Navy, Coonts requested to be trained in drafting, rationalizing that it was as close as he could get to drawing in the navy. His request was not approved. Instead, Coonts became a yeoman and was tasked with clerical work. Unexpectedly, his desk job brought him into contact with a professional artist for the first time in his life. Jim Ward was a graduate of a commercial art program at Virginia Polytechnical University. Ward drew and designed furniture as a freelancer while in the navy.[19] His skills fascinated Coonts. "I had never," Coonts noted, "at that point in my life, seen anyone that could draw like him." He recalled that he "kept looking over Jim's shoulder, probably to the point of annoyance."[20] Eventually, Ward suggested that he pursue commercial art when he left the navy. "I can honestly say," Coonts remembered, "that it was like a light went on. I knew at that point that is what I wanted to do with the rest of my life."[21] After several successful years of naval service and ignoring the urging of his superiors to apply to Officer Candidate School, Coonts was

discharged from the navy in 1958. He returned to Colorado, determined to seek out the next step in his training as an artist and designer.

Coonts began his education at the newly renamed Colorado State University in January 1959, enrolling as an art major. At the time, the university was in a period of transition. Prior to 1957, the university had been Colorado A&M, and it was in the process of recasting itself as a modern land grant university focused on research. As part of the transition, the university added art as an independent academic department. Previously, art had been incorporated in the Department of Home Economics.[22] Part of the establishment of a Department of Art was the development of a curriculum in commercial art, now known as graphic design. John Sorbie, a professor who attained legendary status within the history of the university's art department, headed the program.

In college, Coonts navigated a steep learning curve and other difficulties as he approached art and design as an academic discipline for the first time. "School," Coonts acknowledged, "was not easy."[23] He also struggled with the significant cultural and class differences between himself his classmates, mostly "kids coming from the large Denver high schools." In contrast to him, "they all had some kind of art background." As a result, Coonts explained, "it seemed like I played catch-up for a while."[24] Due to bureaucratic obstacles, Coonts did not receive GI Bill support for his education like other servicemen of his generation. Health difficulties, including three weeklong stints in the hospital and surgery, compounded Coonts's financial difficulties. He returned home to live with his parents during his recovery. During that time, his application for a student loan was denied. Discouraged, Coonts seriously considered giving up. His mother, who left high school during her sophomore year, demanded that he return to school and complete his degree. "Through her insistence," Coonts noted, "I continued. And I thank her for that." Sorbie also urged Coonts to continue his education, and he returned to school to finish his studies.[25]

After returning to school, Coonts's life continued to change quickly. With a year left to complete his art degree, he married Carmen White in 1962. His wife worked while he attended school. By his senior year, Coonts had begun to excel in his classes and absorbed important lessons about what it took to become a professional

artist. Despite his initial struggles, Coonts distinguished himself by his ability to learn valuable lessons from Sorbie's tough teaching style and "brutal" studio critiques. Coonts recalled that in one memorable critique, Sorbie strode into the room late and dumped all his students' work onto the classroom floor. Coonts recounted the incident:

> He just ripped on that class. He said, "This is absolutely the worst work I have ever seen in my life." And just raised hell. . . . Then I went home and I got to thinking about it. And I thought, now wait a minute, I'm in my second class. He's graduated from college, and he's worked in the field for five years. Who knows more? Him or me? . . . So, I went to his office and knocked on his door . . . and I said, "Look, I would like to have you critique this work and I'd like to do the project again." I said, "I want to learn." And he said, "Sure." And he took me in. And from that point, he and I had a relationship that was a friendship for the rest of his life. But, out of that same class, there were four students who quit school. Just because of that. And I joked with him some years later, I said, "Do you remember that time?" And he said, "Yeah, I saved a family some money." He wasn't sorry for it at all!

While Sorbie alienated some students, Coonts's dedication to honing his artistic skills earned his professor's respect. It was the basis for a friendship and productive artistic mentorship that pushed Coonts creatively.

According to Coonts, Sorbie often urged students to "put some guts into it!" Coonts applied that lesson to his first design for the American West Program series in 1972.[26] As Coonts was considering his approach to the first poster in his series, he came across an image of grama grass silhouetted against the sky from the CSU College of Agriculture. He added a sun and inverted the colors of the original image. Still thinking the image insufficiently striking, Coonts punched up the poster even further by coloring the sky a shocking red with a magenta sun surrounded by a glowing halo in a darker red.[27] The potent iconography of the radiant western sun appeared in many of his other designs as a

unifying symbol of the series. It set a precedent that many of the other designs followed, including the use of bold, rich hues and the creative manipulation of images, often sourced from photographs or woodcut books.

Coonts's ability to craft a dynamic relationship between text and images was another important unifying component of his otherwise eclectic work in the poster series. However, most of his education in typography and layout design came during his career as a professional designer. After graduating from CSU in 1963, Coonts interviewed at several design studios in the Denver area, and while the studios liked his work, they did not have job openings available. Coonts's first art job was at the *Rocky Mountain News* in the paper's art department, where he developed designs for daily advertisements. As Coonts recalled, his job at the paper "wasn't much of an art job . . . but it was good training because [he] was learning a lot of the things [he would] need."[28] Within four months, Coonts accepted a new position with the art department of a Denver typography house, Hoflund-Schmidt Typographic Service. He worked there for two years on campaigns for companies like Continental Airlines and Coors Brewing. From there, Coonts worked at a Denver advertising agency, Frye, Sills, and Bridges, for about a year. Although his time there was short, Coonts learned an important lesson from the company's art director, Bill Havens, one that influenced him for the rest of his career:

> One day he [Havens] really gave me an art lesson. And I use it still today. . . . One day, he came into the big room. And I'm sitting there, with my head in my hands, looking out the window. And he said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "I'm trying to think of an idea for this project." And, I forget, I think it was for Frontier Airlines, we were doing an ad for them. And he said, "Think with the end of your pencil."[29]

Havens's instruction to "think with the end of your pencil" meant that the best way to work out design problems was to draw out ideas by using small sketches called thumbnails. Looking back on the incident, Coonts remarked, "That was the best art lesson that I received out of college. And it was a reprimand!" Thinking with

the end of his pencil became Coonts's approach to design and the key to his creative method from that point onward.[30]

As Coonts progressed in his career, he felt the impact of his lack of formal training in layout and typography, particularly during his work with Salesvertising, a top advertising agency in Denver. He struggled there and nearly lost his job due to his inexperience with layout and typography—something that he recalled had been de-emphasized in favor of developing fine arts skills during his college education. The pressure to remain employed there was intense, especially given Coonts's growing family. At the time, Carmen was pregnant with their second child, Brian, who was born in 1967. At the time Coonts thought, "Oh my God, what am I going to do? I'm married, I've got a little boy, and one on the way. And I've got to do something." He taught himself layout and typography by tracing magazine covers and editorial spreads to learn how the designs came together. He recalled, "Looking at it on tracing paper, it gave me a better sense of what that art director was thinking about when he was designing that page." The laborious process of tracing, cutting out, and rearranging elements of an ad or editorial spread, often conducted with his two-year-old, Brent, seated on his lap, taught him to dissect the individual elements of a print layout.

In his body of work for the American West Program series, Coonts used typography to create movement in the designs—running around corners, such as in the 1984 design for *Exploration: The American West,* or scaling an edge of a frame, as it does in the 1973 poster, *The Southwest*. In addition to applying text in unexpected places, Coonts manipulated text to reinforce connections to the American West Program's theme for a particular year—for example, he used a Spanish-style cross to replace the letter "T" in his 1992 design for *Encounter: 1492–1992*. A dominant vertical block of red text evoked vintage western movie posters for *The Lawman,* which he created in 2002.

Coonts deployed text and typography symbolically within his images to create layers of meaning. In his 1993 work, *Women's Suffrage,* a red block of text covers a woman's mouth to portray the period of history prior to women's suffrage as a time when women were politically silenced.[31] Coonts noted, "I tried to be distinct with the typography in some way. And let that be a really

integral part of the poster's design." It was sometimes maximalist, as in the case of the threateningly spiked, gothic-inspired text crowning his 1998 work, *Manifest Destiny and the West,* and the eclectic hodgepodge of scales and fonts he used in *Eccentrics in the West* (1995). Type was also sometimes expansive and minimalist, exemplified by 1996's *The West Beckoned*. The style of the typography evoked optimism, openness, and endless possibility—values that many immigrants associated with the land and culture of the American West.[32]

Coonts's masterful use of typography and images to convey key topics in western history occasionally sparked controversy. Some of his designs offered critique of wrongs that had been perpetrated in the American past. His 1999 design, *Manifest Destiny Realized, 1850–1898,* featured a large hand with the thumb pressing down on the word "Realized" in white text, illustrating white settlers' brutal racialized oppression of Native Americans during the period of American westward expansion. The image drew critique from the campus community as well as from many others in Fort Collins. Coonts later recounted his surprise at the outcry:

> It's a drawing of my hand, my right hand. . . . To me, that was a great solution and concept. And I still think of all of the posters, that was the strongest concept. . . . Well, I didn't know anything about it for quite a while. And then Harry Rosenberg told me one day that it really created a furor on campus, that people were calling for it to be picked back up and destroyed. And all because of that image, the entire thing because of that image. I couldn't believe it.[33]

Coonts's supporters held fast. CSU president Al Yates and history professor Harry Rosenberg, the coordinator of the American West Program, both protected Coonts's design and the critique of the West's racial history to which it gave voice.[34] Coonts noted, "I just found [the outrage] terribly interesting. The thinking. And that still exists, I think."[35] Well before the history of race had become an everyday topic of public debate in the United States, Coonts's 1999 work was a meditation on white fragility that could have easily come from the social discourse of the racial justice movements more than twenty years later.

Following his time at Salesvertising and a stint as a freelancer, Coonts received an offer to not only teach at his alma mater but also become the art director for the Office of Printing and Publications. He had never had a staff before, and he began the job "scared to death."[36] Much of his work involved improving the standard of design at the university, including its institutional brand. At the time, "it was terrible. Each department did their own thing. . . . It was just a mishmash—there was no cohesiveness to brochures, or flyers, anything. . . . My job was to sort it all out." After a rocky transition period, Coonts built his design team, and under his leadership, they began to find success. They became members of the newly founded University and College Designers Association. When that happened, Coonts recalled, "We started entering national shows and started doing well."[37]

Eventually, his supervisor recommended that Coonts transition to a purely supervisory role as art director and step back from the work of designing. The recommendation did not go over well. Coonts remarked, "Well, I didn't want to do that. I still wanted to be the artist. So, I left the university in 1974 and started freelancing." From CSU, he went on to establish his own design studio. His business was successful for over thirty years and employed a team of twelve artists and designers at its height. His marriage to Carmen White did not last, but Coonts found a passionate supporter and life partner in Sallie Hagen Zorch, whom he met at a party in 1986 and later married. Coonts sold his graphic design business in 1994 and launched his career as a fine artist, mostly creating paintings and sculptures. Reflecting on the trajectory of his life, Coonts remarked, "[People] will say, 'Oh, you're so talented.' I don't believe in that. I don't see the talent. To me, it was just a desire to do what I'm doing, and a lot of hard work. . . . I truly believe that I could sit with anybody and teach them to be an artist."[38]

Coonts's work on the American West Program posters spanned his time at CSU, and he continued to contribute designs to the series when he left his position at the university to build his studio. He also retained his position as a CSU affiliate faculty member and continued in that role until 2003. He remained on close terms with the program's organizing committee as the program changed hands and its focus and audience shifted. By the time the poster

series came to a close in 2002, the collection spanned thirty years, and his images had become a staple of campus design, with copies of his posters hanging in academic departments, faculty offices, classrooms, and administrative buildings. In the early 2020s, Dr. Leisl Carr Childers of the Department of History spearheaded the effort, along with CSU's Special Collections staff, to gather and preserve the complete series of posters, ensuring that they would be preserved for future students, scholars, and the public. In 2022, the entire collection was displayed together for the first time at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the American West Program. A dedication ceremony on September 20 included remarks from Carr Childers and Coonts, commemorating his years of celebrated artwork. The posters not only documented an important part of CSU's institutional history but also celebrated Coonts's life in his vibrant and iconic works of art.

Notes

1. Bob Coonts, oral history interview notes, March 1, 2021, Public Lands History Center, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Bob Coonts, interview by Ariel Schnee, March 9, 2021, in Fort Collins, CO, digital recording, Public Lands History Center, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO.
5. Coonts, oral history interview notes, March 1, 2021.
6. Bob Coonts, interview by Ariel Schnee, March 9, 2021.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. This type of composition of densely packed faces all facing in the same direction also appears in other Rockwell works, including *A Bright Future for Banking*.
11. Coonts, oral history interview notes, March 1, 2021.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Bob Coonts, interview by Ariel Schnee, March 9, 2021.

15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Coonts, oral history interview notes, March 1, 2021.
18. Ibid.
19. Bob Coonts, interview by Ariel Schnee, March 9, 2021.
20. Coonts, oral history interview notes, March 1, 2021.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Bob Coonts, interview by Ariel Schnee, March 9, 2021.
26. Ibid.
27. Bob Coonts, interview by Ariel Schnee, March 23, 2021, in Fort Collins, CO, digital recording, Public Lands History Center, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO.
28. Bob Coonts, interview by Ariel Schnee, March 9, 2021.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Bob Coonts, interview by Ariel Schnee, March 23, 2021.
32. Ibid.
33. Bob Coonts, interview by Ariel Schnee, March 9, 2021.
34. Coonts, Oral History Interview Notes.
35. Bob Coonts, interview by Ariel Schnee, March 9, 2021.
36. Ibid.
37. Coonts, Oral History Interview Notes.
38. Bob Coonts, interview by Ariel Schnee, March 23, 2021.

Bob Coonts: Interpreting the American West

Posters from the American West Program, 1972–2002

The historic American West Program at Colorado State University between 1972 and 1978 embodied the best efforts of the College of Liberal Arts to bring noted liberal arts scholars and public figures to campus, showcase the efforts of CSU faculty, and engage public audiences in the work of the university on the American West. AWP annual events incorporated multiple disciplines and created sessions, talks, and classes that appealed to non-academic audiences on the Front Range in the best spirit of CSU's land grant mission. The iconic visual signifiers of the AWP during this period and in the second iteration of AWP from 1984 to 2002 were the posters of renowned graphic artist and CSU alumnus Bob Coonts. Encapsulating the AWP theme each year, the Coonts posters vividly depicted the essence of the intellectual discussion and were extremely popular with public audiences.

Introduction

In 1972, Colorado State University launched the American West Program, a summer class and lecture series for Front Range community members about the region in which they lived. The program featured scholars from multiple disciplines, especially those in the liberal arts, and featured renowned scholars of the region, particularly historians. Since that time, the American West Program has undergone several iterations, but the posters created by graphic artist Bob Coonts, which visually conveyed the content of each annual program, have remained its most iconic element.

1972–1978

The first series of American West Programs showcased CSU's leadership and expertise on the region. Programming included speakers such as politicians and administrators, writers, and American Indian scholars and leaders, classes, art exhibitions, and other public summer programming.

1984–2002

In its second iteration, Professor Harry Rosenberg of the Department of History led the planning of the American West Programs supported by a College of Liberal Arts board. Topics and programming focused on making connections between the university and the Front Range community.

Legacy

The American West Program continued after 2002, but without the compelling posters produced by Bob Coonts. More than any other aspect of the program, the visually rich images that accompanied the program from 1972 to the 2002 captured the imagination and drew hundreds of attendees to the program each year.



[1972] THE AMERICAN WEST AT COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

The rising sun over the grasslands commemorated the 100th anniversary of Yellowstone National Park from the perspective of the Great Plains. The program featured Farrington R. Carpenter, first Director of the Grazing Service, Clyde D. Dollar, Robert M. Utley, Chief Historian of the National Park Service, and Congressman Wayne Aspinall as the keynote speaker.



[1973] THE SOUTHWEST

The Zia sun symbol and images found on petroglyphs on the Colorado Plateau signified the Southwest. The program featured the work of artist Peter Hurd, Senator Floyd Haskell, Robert Delaney, founder of the Center for Southwest Studies at Fort Lewis College, and author and environmentalist Edward Abbey.



[1974] THE NORTHWEST

The profile of an Indigenous figure wrapped in a blanket against a sun low on the horizon invoked memories of Chief Joseph. The program featured Indigenous scholars and critics on panels addressing American Indian art, culture, and the Red Power movement, with a keynote address by Vine Deloria Jr., author of *Custer Died for Your Sins.*



[1975] THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN WEST

The mountains and forest punctuated by a series of vertical suns invoked a view of the Rockies from the west. The program featured Senator Gary Hart, Governor Richard Lamm, and popular western writer David S. Lavender.



[1976] THE BICENTENNIAL WEST

The foothills and mountains against a blue sky with thirteen stars in the shape of a rising sun invoked the symbology of the nation's bicentennial in the context of Colorado. The program featured Paul Stewart, founder of the Black American West Museum, writer Carol S. Pearson, and a keynote address by Vine Deloria Jr., author of *God Is Red*.



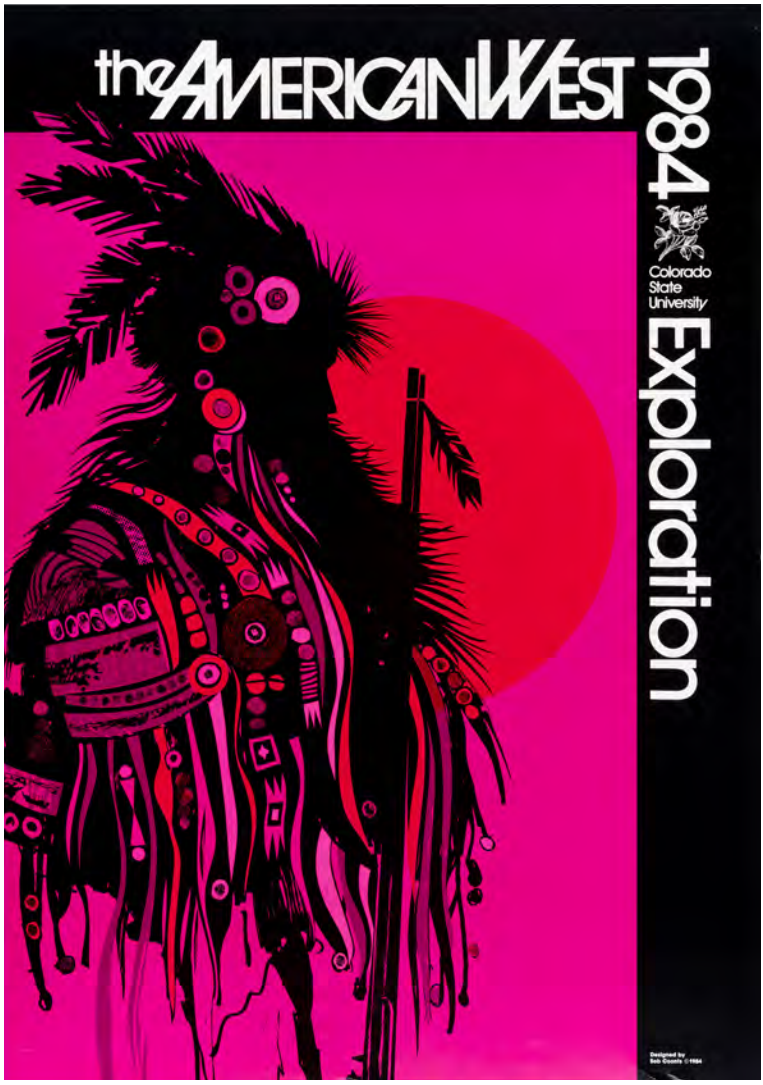
[1977] THE CHANGING WEST

The subtle sequence of images that invoke Arizona's Superstition Mountains, Chaco Canyon and Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico, and the Texas Alamo on a right diagonal with desert vegetation and figures that allude to Geronimo and Davy Crockett provide the impression of evolution through conflict reflected in the programming.



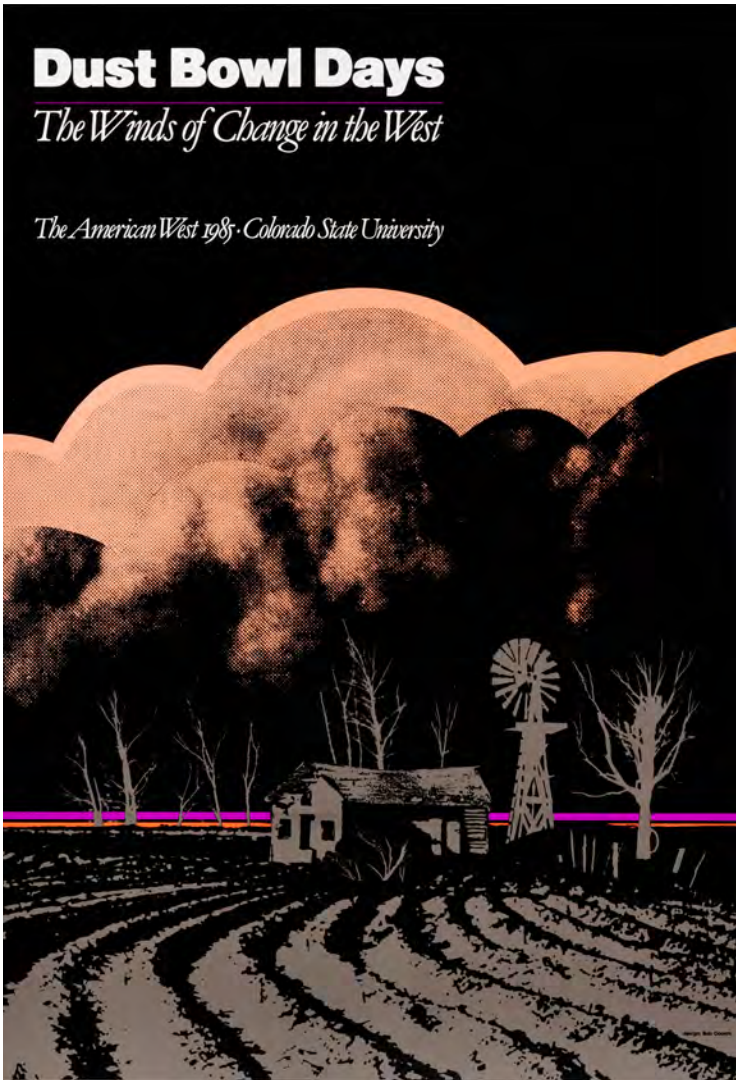
[1978] THE GREAT AMERICAN DESERT

A branch of ponderosa pine flowering with cones foregrounded against the colors of a sunset over the grasslands symbolizes the Front Range. The program featured former Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall, Pueblo artists the Youngbloods, and noted western historian Ray Allen Billington.



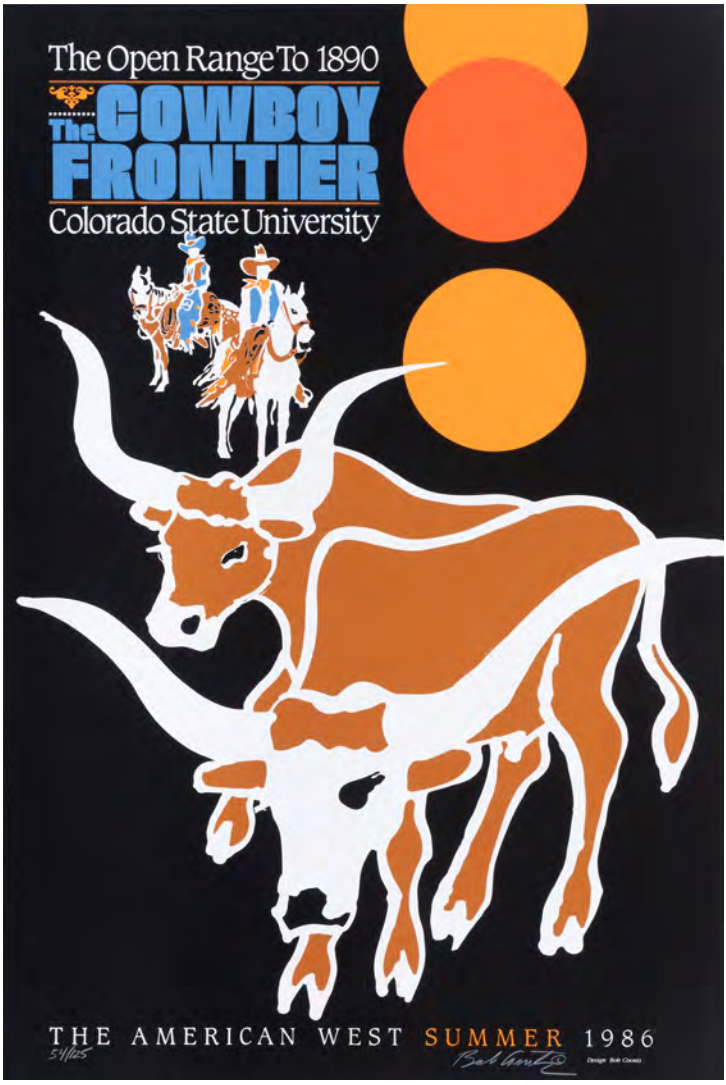
[1984] EXPLORATON

The richly regaled image of a fur trader who moved between Indigenous and European worlds in the era of colonization signified the emphasis of a program that included the Black American West Museum, Denver Art Museum, and the Overland Trail Fur Company.



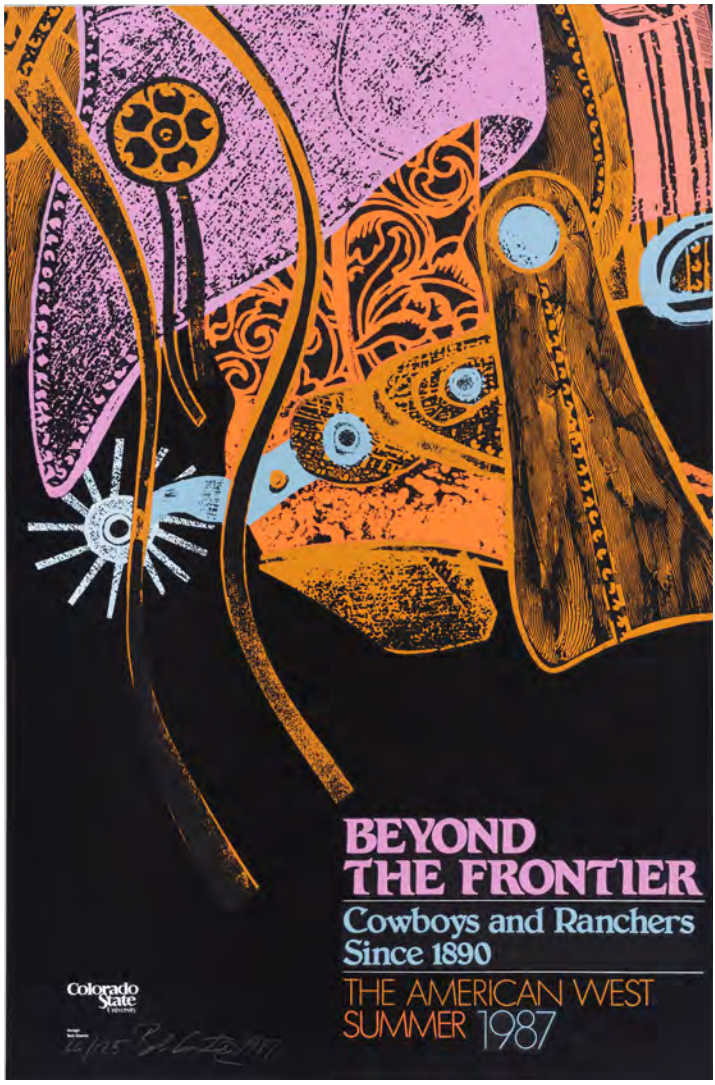
[1985] DUST BOWL DAYS: THE WINDS OF CHANGE IN THE WEST

The looming cloud of dust dwarfing the dry fields of a Great Plains farm invoked the most famous image of the Dust Bowl for the program that commemorated the catastrophe's 50th anniversary and featured historians, conservation leaders, and ranchers.



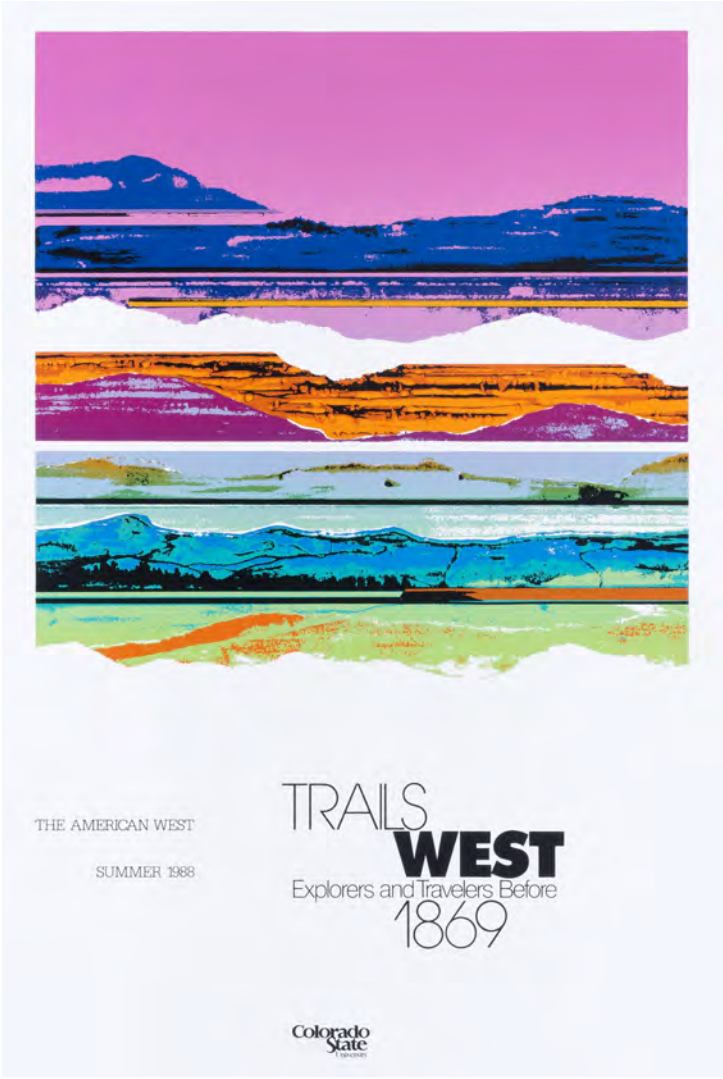
[1986] THE OPEN RANGE TO 1890: THE COWBOY FRONTIER

The longhorns leading cowboys on horseback in the background invoked the era of the open range for the program that featured ranchers, the Pro Rodeo Cowboys Association, and founder of the Fort restaurant Sam Arnold.



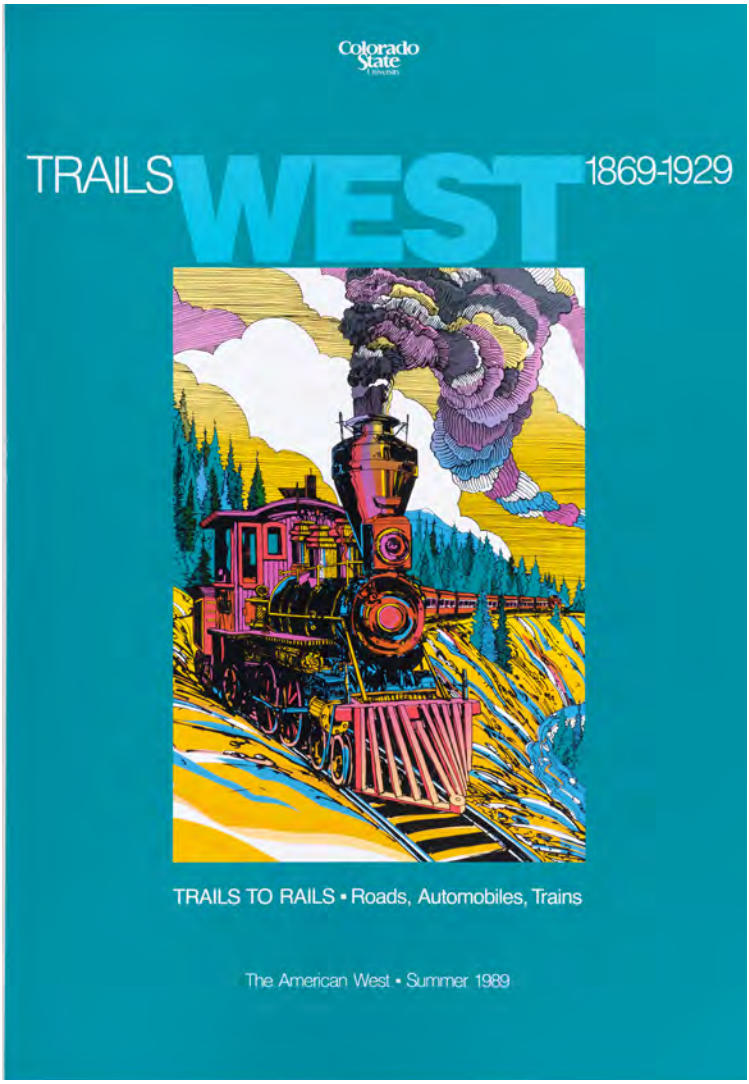
[1987] BEYOND THE FRONTIER: COWBOYS AND RANCHERS SINCE 1890

Shifting from the era of the open range to that of the modern cowboy invoked by the image of a western rider on horseback wearing boots, spurs, and chaps, the program focused on the mythic West and featured poet Gretel Ehrlich.



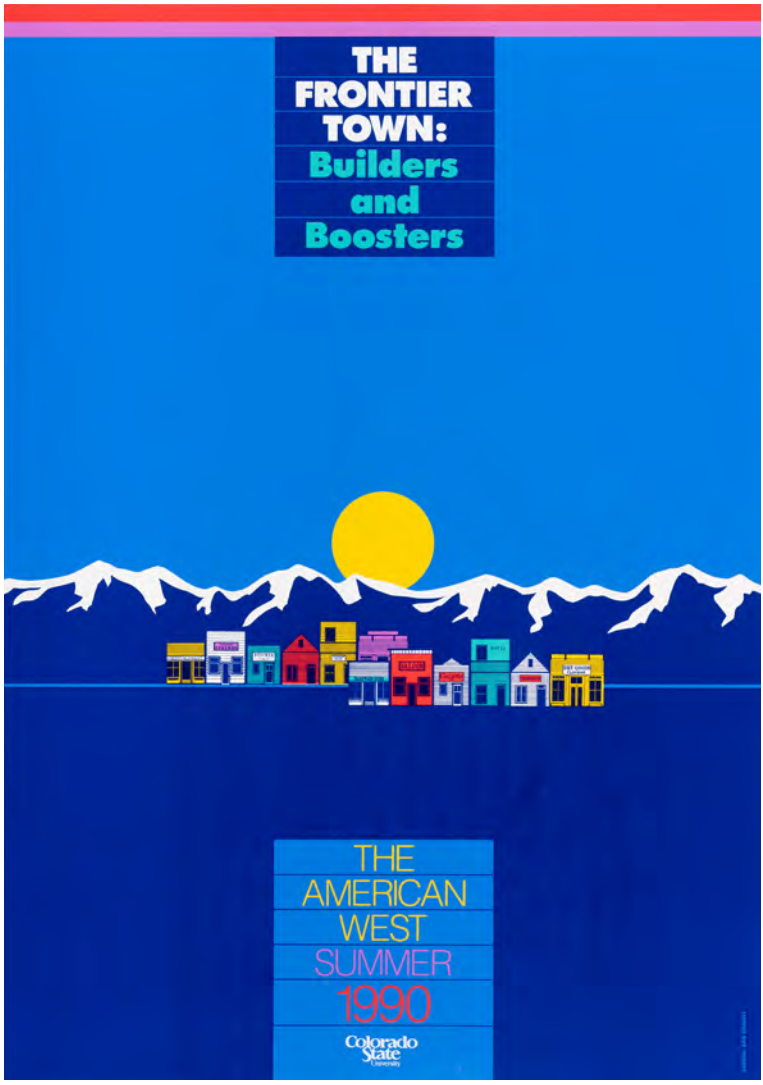
[1988] TRAILS WEST: EXPLORERS AND TRAVELERS BEFORE 1869

The successive horizons that invoke the Rocky Mountains, the Colorado Plateau, and the ranges of the Great Basin in a landscape absent of roads embodied the Overland Trail and its travails. The program featured former Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall and historian Patricia Nelson Limerick, who had just published her controversial work *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West.*



[1989] TRAILS WEST 1869–1929: TRAILS TO RAILS

The steam engine billowing its cloud of vapor as it climbs into the mountains emphasized the focus of the following year's program that featured the Colorado Railroad Museum, Colorado historian Duane E. Smith, and Western singers Liz Masterson and Sean Blackburn, who helped launch the City of Fort Collins's first NewWest Fest that year.



[1990] THE FRONTIER TOWN: BUILDERS AND BOOSTERS

The profile of the main street of a frontier town backed by snow-capped peaks and a golden sun conveyed the emphasis on the birth of the urban American West. The program featured an array of historians presenting on different aspects of urban life and demographics in the 1890s.



[1991] WESTERN CITY LIFE IN THE 1920S: A COLORFUL CAST OF CHARACTERS

The imagery from the 1920s, from cars and telephones to jazz music and typewriters, marked the emergence of an urban nation. Focused on the Denver metro area, the program featured aspects of city life from radio station personalities and newspaper journalists to the development of the tourist industry and modern manufacturing.



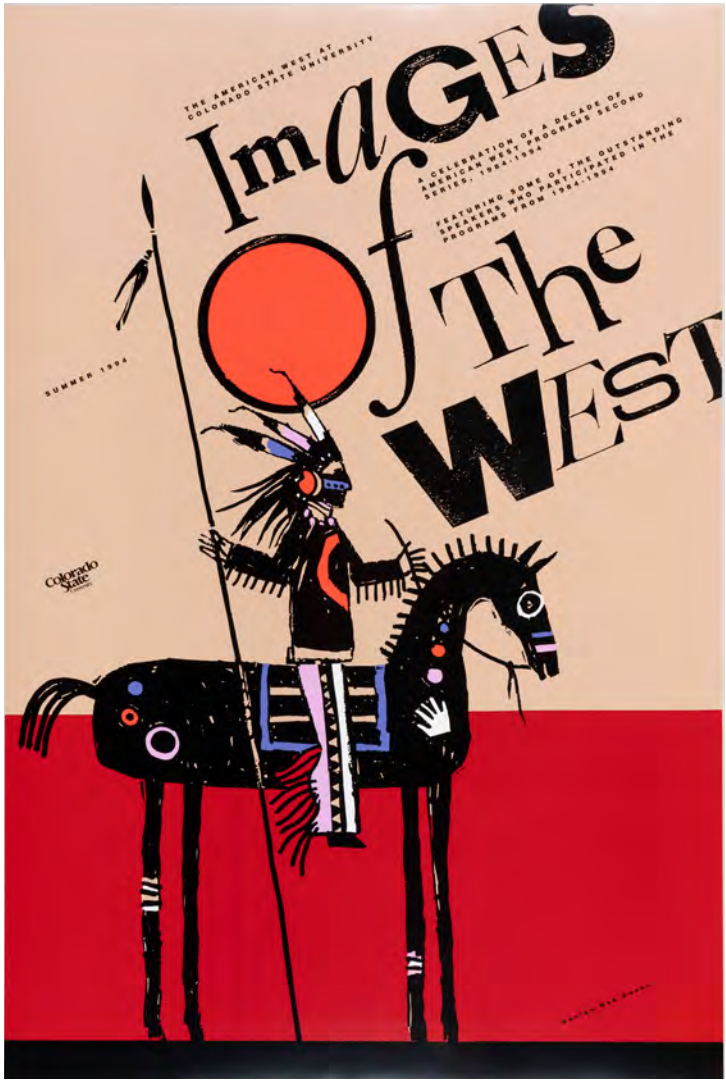
[1992] THE FRONTIER THROUGH THE EYES OF . . . ENCOUNTER 1492–1992

The globe featuring North America held as a shield by an Indigenous person in profile along with the Christian cross signified the perspective from which frontier encounters occurred. Marking the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus, the program examined contact from multiple perspectives.



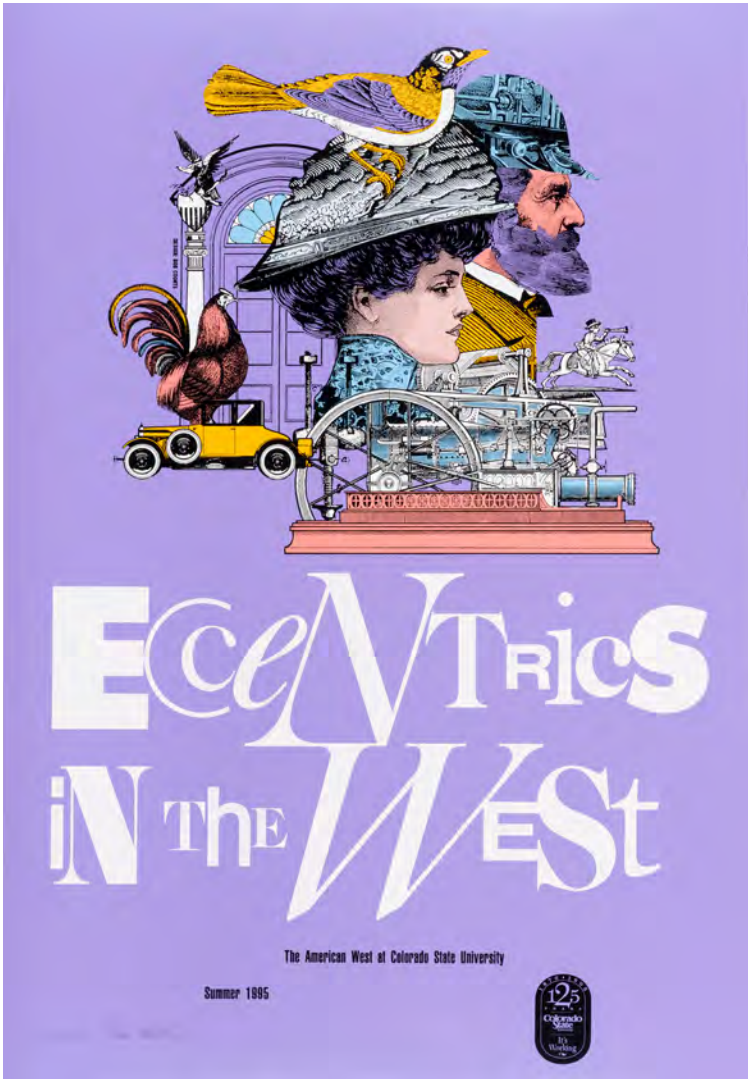
[1993] THE FRONTIER THROUGH THE EYES OF . . . WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE 1893–1993

Commemorating the centennial of women's suffrage in Colorado, the imagery of a woman in period clothing muted by a red bar bearing the words "women's suffrage" highlighted the work yet to be done to achieve gender equality. The program emphasized western women's history.



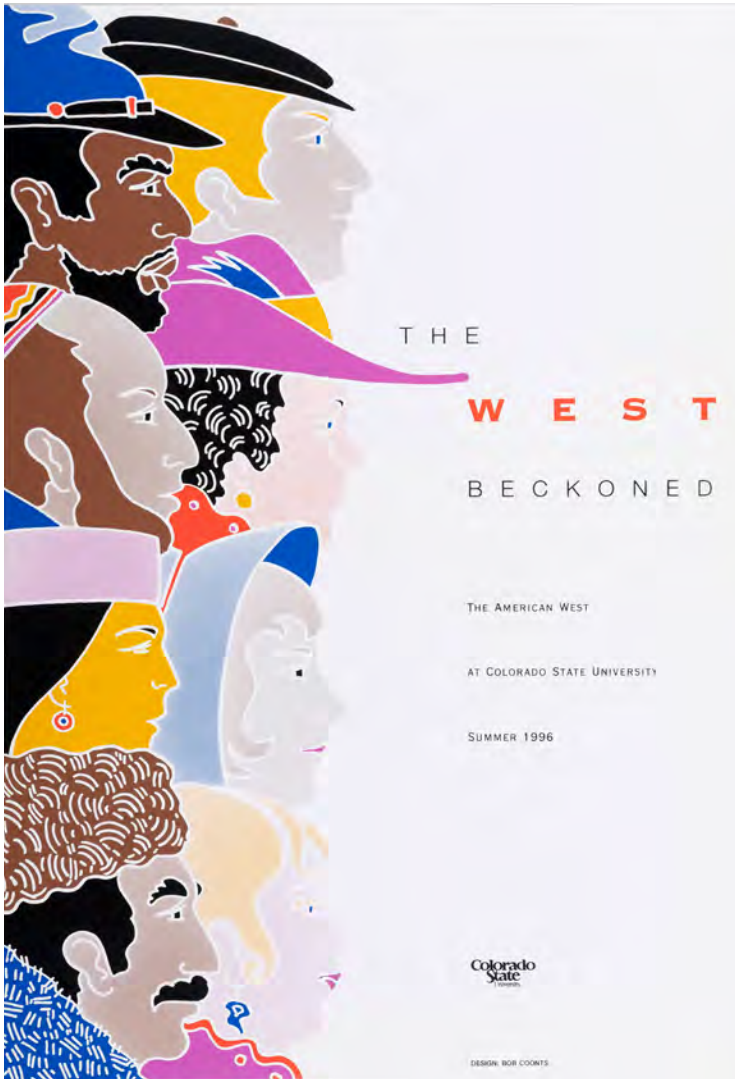
[1994] IMAGES OF THE WEST

To mark a decade of American West Programs, Bob Coonts created a poster that referenced the ledger art produced by incarcerated Indigenous peoples. For the first time, the graphic artist gave a talk, and the program displayed his posters from 1972 though 1994 in an exhibition.



[1995] ECCENTRICS IN THE WEST

Featuring inventors, innovations, and inventions, images invoked the different personalities and oddities that could be found in the American West. The program also highlighted the 125th anniversary of Colorado State University.



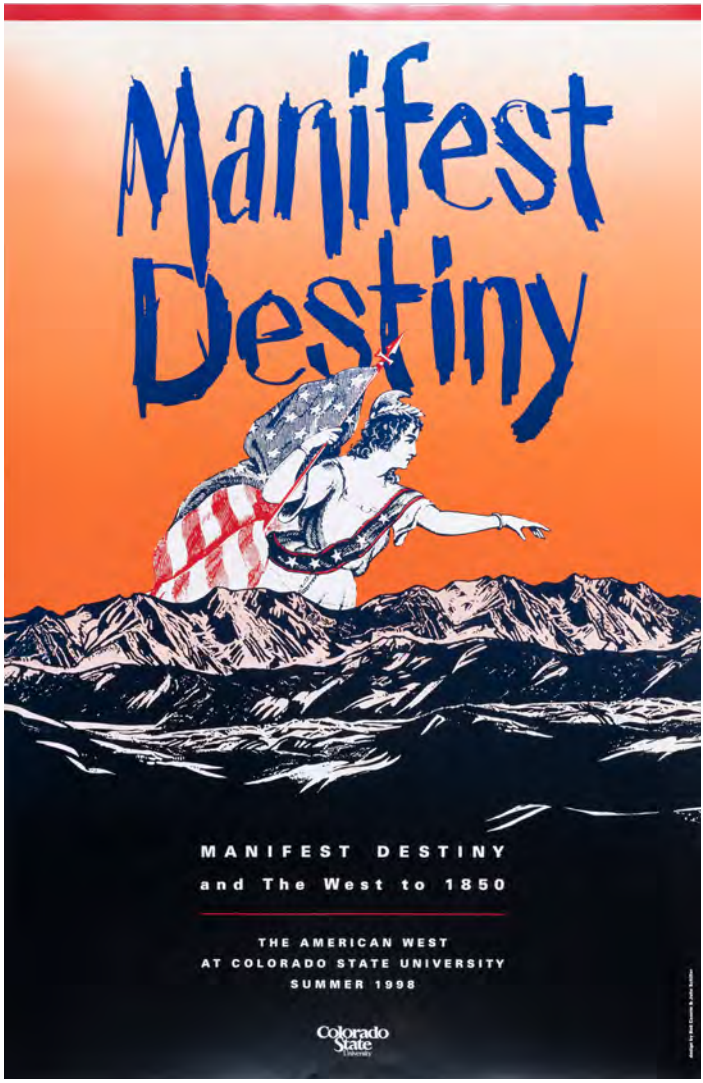
[1996] THE WEST BECKONED

The profiles of those who came to and lived in the American West face the East in a subtle reference to the diversity of the region's demographics. The program featured talks on groups from the Buffalo Soldiers to an array of immigrant groups, including Basque and Jewish, Chinese and Japanese, and Irish and Cornish peoples.



[1997] THE WEST STILL BECKONS

White clouds over a blue horizon provide a unifying element to the demographic complexity on the ground discussed in this program. Continuing the conversation, presenters discussed other groups from Mormons and miners to immigrants from Italy and Latin America.



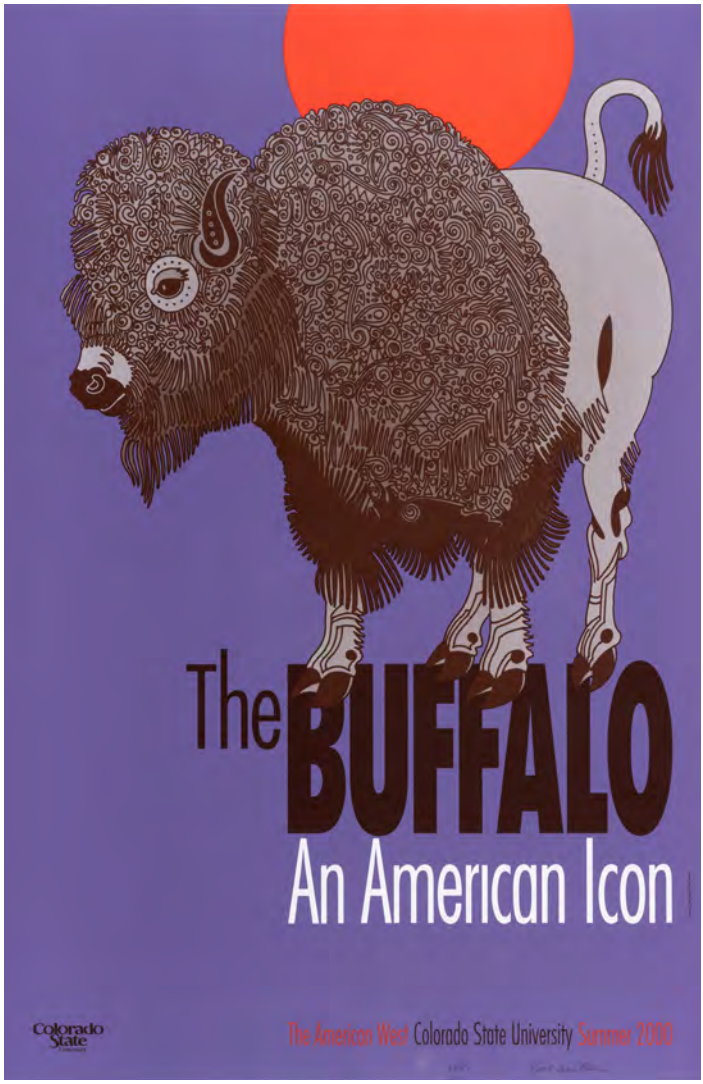
[1998] MANIFEST DESTINY AND THE WEST TO 1850

The white figure of Columbia stretching her left arm over the mountains, holding an American flag in her right, symbolized the aggressive reach of the rapidly expanding United States. The program featured discussions of Manifest Destiny, an idea that undergirded the removal of Indigenous peoples and permeated American culture and politics.



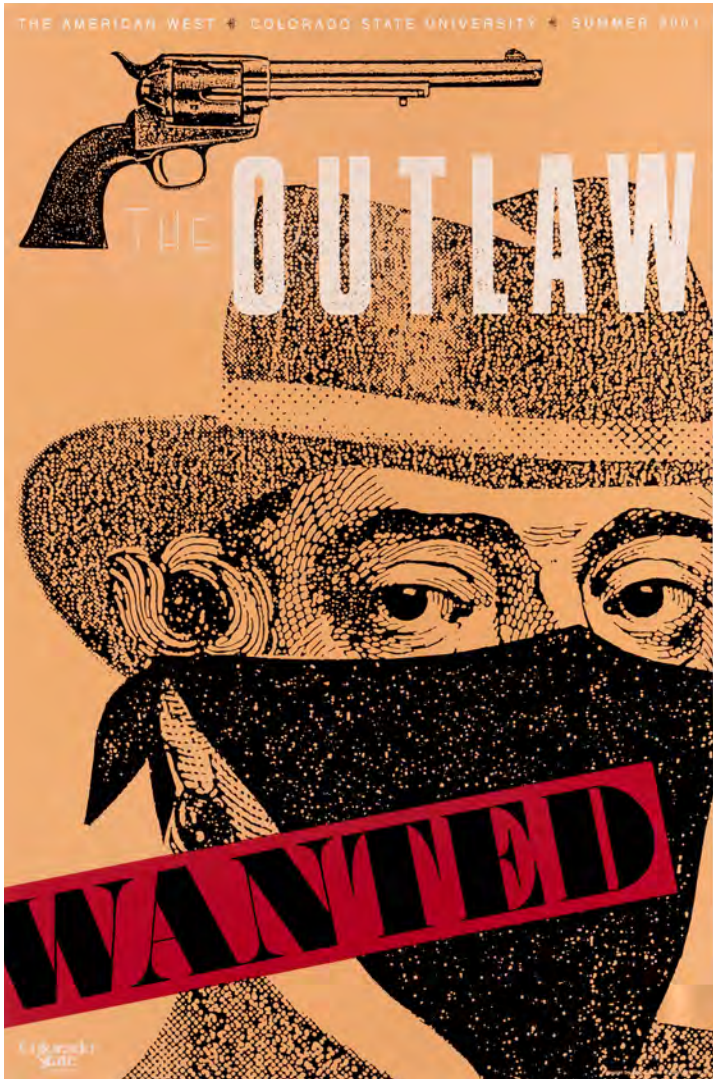
[1999] MANIFEST DESTINY REALIZED, 1850–1898

This image of a dark hand with its thumb pressing down on the word "Realized" symbolized the consequences of Manifest Destiny. The controversial image embodied a program that articulated the violent consequences of American expansion, including the wars with Indigenous peoples, the Civil War, and the Spanish-American War.



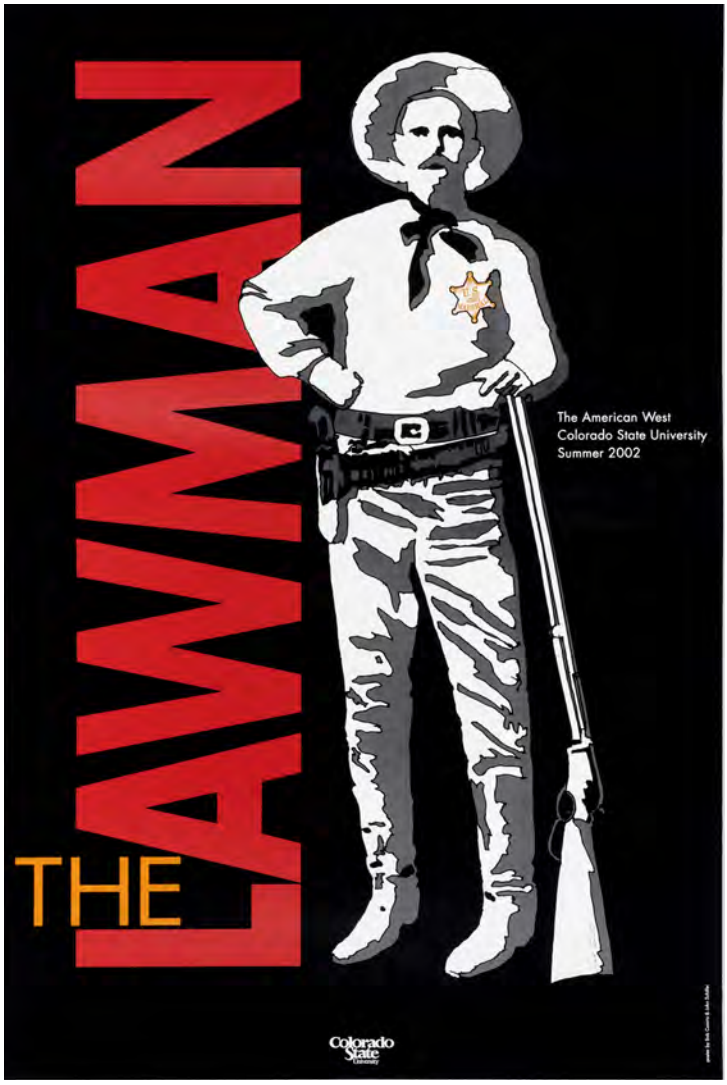
[2000] THE BUFFALO: AN AMERICAN ICON

The magnificent rendering of an American bison under a red sun privileged the importance of this iconic animal in the history of the American West. The program was the first since the 1970s to take an environmental focus and featured discussions of the meaning and preservation of the buffalo.



[2001] THE OUTLAW

A Colt revolver alongside a face concealed by a handkerchief underneath a cowboy hat invoked the classic image of a western outlaw. This program delved into the classic construct of outlaws from Jesse James to Billy the Kid.



[2002] THE LAWMAN

The companion to the outlaw was the lawman with the star-shaped badge and the Winchester rifle. The final program visualized by Bob Coonts featured talks on the wives of lawmen, western courts, as well as icons like Bat Masterson and Pat Garrett.

Significance Multiplied: The Bob Coonts Collection in the Colorado State University Libraries

Patricia J. Rettig

In July 1999, Colorado State University (CSU) faculty affiliate and graphic designer Bob Coonts donated a small set of his posters to the CSU Libraries. While academic libraries rarely collect contemporary poster art, local precedent had already been set, stemming from CSU's dedication to and expertise in graphic design education. Even if it were the sole poster collection held by the CSU Libraries, the Coonts Collection would hold significance, but because its thirty-two pieces are among the nearly five thousand collected over the last thirty years, its cultural and research value is multiplied.

Poster collecting began at the Libraries in 1991 through a partnership with the university's Department of Art and Art History. Since 1979, that department has held, with great success, the Colorado International Invitational Poster Exhibition (CIIPE), bringing to students and the community alike important benefits of

exposure to global graphic design. By collaborating on preserving the posters accepted for each biennial exhibition, the Libraries and Department of Art and Art History have perpetuated the show's benefits and have created a unique educational resource. The Libraries' International Poster Collection, which holds the CIIPE items, now contains over twenty-seven hundred entries from more than fifty countries.

The CIIPE posters, submitted by invited artists, number from about 150 to 250 selections per show. All created within two years prior to entry, the posters depict a wide range of social issues and cultural events. Images vary from pleasant to provocative, causing a viewer to respond instantly and perhaps gaze deeply. Each biennial exhibition may serendipitously have several posters that address a common issue, such as COVID in the 2022 show, which was delayed a year because of the global pandemic. Additionally, certain themes, such as protecting the environment, recur in multiple years, making possible the study of artistic depictions across both time and place.

As one of the CIIPE cofounders and long-time codirectors, Coonts made his mark on this unique event. For a number of years, he created the exhibition catalog, establishing a design precedent that has continued for subsequent shows. Listed in the exhibition catalog as a codirector emeritus starting with the 2015 show, the nineteenth CIIPE, Coonts contributed for more than three decades.

His contributions to the American West Program predated CIIPE and established a design precedent. As the creator of the posters promoting the annual series, Coonts translated the theme from oral ideas to visual images. These images served not only as advertising to attract attendees, but also as a conveyance of the concepts to be discussed, distilled to their essence in graphic form. Meeting the annual challenge, Coonts adeptly depicted complex themes such as "The West Beckoned" and "Eccentrics in the West."

Matching the years of the American West Program, the Coonts posters are identified as two series, the first from 1972 to 1978 and the second from 1984 to 2002, for twenty-six total creations. These (along with a print of the 1973 poster with no text) compose the majority of the Coonts Collection at the Libraries. Twenty-two of the thirty-two items in the current collection were originally donated by the artist. As the fiftieth anniversary of the program

approached, history faculty located on campus the five posters that would complete the American West set and arranged for their addition to the Coonts Collection.

Beyond the American West posters, the remainder of the Coonts Collection is composed of five unrelated posters received in 2011 from an external donor. Created in the 1980s, they provide a small sample of what else the artist was designing. One of the posters, *Dreamworks,* created for the Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce, features an abstracted butterfly. Two celebrate Christmas joy, while two others promote peace. One of the latter, *Peace and Release,* honors CSU professor Tom Sutherland, held hostage in Beirut from 1985 to 1991, and shows a photo of him along with an image of a yellow ribbon around a tree.

Preserved with archival polyester enclosures and interleaved tissue paper in flat map case drawers, the Coonts posters have all been digitized and made available online through the Libraries' digital repository, Mountain Scholar. Stored in the Archives and Special Collections poster room in Morgan Library, the original posters are available for anyone to access in person, with staff assistance. Seeing the original items conveys not only the artist's choice of paper and colors, but also size, which can be difficult to assess online. Many of the Coonts posters measure thirty-six by twenty-four inches, with the largest in the collection reaching forty by thirty inches.

Upon its donation, the Coonts Collection was recognized as an important enhancement to the International Poster Collection. The smallest of the associated poster collections, the Coonts Collection is paralleled by collections from the two other founding CIIPE co-directors, John Sorbie and Phil Risbeck. The Sorbie Collection, containing 113 posters from the 1970s to the 1980s, features advertising posters for local Colorado and CSU cultural events. The Risbeck Collection contains similar content in its 103 posters, with a wider date range of 1973 to 2017. These three collections, with their combined nearly 250 posters, stand together to speak not only to one another but also to the accumulation of CIIPE posters. When considered as both independent collections and as a whole, they show the interests and artistic achievements of the CIIPE founders and further serve to reveal something about the men's impact on the international show—and its on them.

The Libraries' poster collections extend beyond the core CIIPE and directors' collections, augmenting the impact and educational possibilities of them all. Five collections come directly from CIIPE artists, often the show's poster laureate, who has a local exhibition as a satellite to the main one. Several artists, including Brazilian Felipe Taborda and Danish designer Gitte Kath, donated their locally exhibited posters to the Libraries, thus complementing the CIIPE posters from those years. These associated collections range from 25 to 198 items, allowing for deeper research into their work and creativity. The largest is from the Polish poster artist known as Witold-K, whose collection contains his own work along with that of some of his Polish contemporaries, providing an extensive look at one country's graphic design community.

Two additional collections add further context and research value to the core collections. One, collected by communications entrepreneur John Kluge and donated to the Libraries in 2000, is composed of a selection of 1,156 posters from *Graphis* poster catalogs. The Kluge Collection includes advertisements and cultural and social posters from the 1980s and 1990s. The other, the CSU Collection, which continues to grow, contains more than 250 posters promoting CSU events, often theatrical, musical, or dance performances. These include dozens of items by Risbeck and Sorbie, a few by Coonts, and one each by current CIIPE codirectors John Gravdahl and Jason Frazier.

The Coonts Collection—focused on the American West Program and situated amongst collections of CIIPE posters, those of fellow directors and CIIPE artists, and CSU posters—holds a unique place within the Libraries' poster offerings. The collection connects CSU history-centered programming, excellence in graphic design, and international achievement, adding a significant dimension to the university's role in the American West and its educational possibilities.

A Razorback among the Rams

Elliott West

I was aware of and benefited from Colorado State University's commitment to the history and study of the American West well before I had the pleasure of taking part in its longstanding and highly regarded American West Program. Even while a graduate student in Boulder, I of course knew of another community of scholars just up the road who were working so faithfully in the historical vineyards where I was just beginning to labor. Later I got a taste of just how large that community was and just how rich its contributions have been to understanding the West.

From 1992 to 1993 my family was in Chicago, where I was perched at the Newberry Library, studying the environmental history of the Great Plains. This was a new turn for me, and I found the whole shebang both fascinating and absolutely bewildering. We all have learned that any topic worth pursuing is by definition one that will threaten to overwhelm us, but the threat here was

one of a rare order. I was gradually discovering that the Plains are an immeasurably complex place, quite literally from the grassroots up. As I read voluminous technical literature on plains ecology, it struck me how much had been written by the faculty in agricultural sciences at Colorado State University.

So there I was in the lobby of the Newberry Library, standing at a payphone with a bagful of quarters (this was long before cellphones were ubiquitous), hoping that one or two of the scholars I had read might spare five or so minutes to help with some of the many points that were puzzling me. The response was far beyond anything I had hoped. All were universally eager to help, remarkably generous with their time, information, and advice, and blessedly tolerant of someone they surely considered barely above clueless.

I recalled that time when I was asked to write about my experience with the American West Program. From the start—it began in 1972, the year after I finished graduate school—it has drawn from the resources across its campus and from the community beyond in presenting programs on a wide variety of subjects about the West, so I was naturally pleased and honored to be asked to take part in the summer of 2000. The subject that year was "The Buffalo: An American Icon." It was a topic that held a special interest for me. I had recently published a couple of books on the Great Plains: *The Way West: Essays on the Central Plains* (1995) and *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (1998). Both had necessarily led me to plains environmental history (and to that payphone at the Newberry), which of course led to particular attention to the animal that the public here and around the world most associates with that part of the world.

Clearly I was not alone in my interest. Known popularly and, here, appropriately as "buffs," the buffalo (actually it is the bison; all true buffaloes are native to the eastern hemisphere) has drawn a remarkable range of ardent attention both from card-carrying academics and, at least as fruitfully, from lay persons. All have been caught up in a fascination with a creature that has come to be intimately bound up with our collective identity. Congress has declared *Bison americanus* our national mammal.

Something similar might be said about the West generally. It is fair to say that it commands a wider national interest than other regions. Certainly that is so in popular culture—in film, fiction,

television, and art, we speak of "westerns" but not "southerns" or "midwesterns"—and the many aspects of western history and life have drawn a studied devotion from the public at large. As an experiment, go to the online catalog of the New York Public Library and enter the topic "American West." You will find more than twenty thousand entries. Scan through a few pages and you cannot help but be struck by how many are clearly pitched to a general audience. Do a bit of research on the authors and you will see how many—my guess is a clear majority—come to their subjects from outside academia.

The American West Program has recognized and respected that wide interest from its beginning. Its inaugural program was inspired by the hundredth anniversary of the founding of Yellowstone, the world's first national park. The offerings that summer were extensive. Presenters included some of the obvious suspects. The banquet address was by Robert Utley, chief historian of the National Park Service as well as his generation's premier historian of western military history. Yellowstone's enabling law dedicated the park as a "pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people," but the years following would raise plenty of questions about just what the people's pleasures were and how pursuing them might, and might not, benefit America and the West. The program reflected those questions. One talk was on the changing nature of dude ranching and another was on reserving and using historic and prehistoric materials of Native peoples. Wayne Aspinall, congressman from western Colorado and an icon of reclamation, delivered a keynote address on the tension between providing outdoor recreation and preserving environmental quality. There was due consideration to Indian peoples, including a panel on the teaching and writing of American Indian history. The scope of the program was broader still, with an exhibition of the work of Thomas Moran, who first exposed the wonders of Yellowstone to the nation's public, and even an exhibition on the American West Stampede Rodeo.

That pattern persisted. Twenty-eight years later, when I came to Fort Collins to take my turn in what had become a venerable program, the presentations were of a similar range. Mine, "Icons on the Hoof," traced the evolving images of the bison from the first European contact to today, when the great shaggies appear

in popular media from film to advertising and fashion. A fine colleague in the guild, Brian Dippie of the University of British Columbia, focused on one aspect of that fascination in "Flying Buffaloes: Artists and the Buffalo Hunt." In another nod to popular culture, Tom Morrison, superintendent of Nebraska's Buffalo Bill Ranch Historical Park, spoke personally on the enduring appeal of the man who at his height was the most recognizable American on earth. Getting down to gustatory basics, the late and sainted Sam Arnold, proprietor of the Fort, the excellent Morrison restaurant modeled on Bent's Fort along the Arkansas River, gave us "Bison—A Millennial Entrée." JoAllyn Archambault, enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux and a director of the American Museum of Natural History, presented on the central place of the buffalo in Plains Indian religion and culture. The near extinction of the bison is probably this nation's most infamous case of environmental misconduct, which makes the animal's return from the edge of obliteration a story of redemption and hope, one told by Harold Danz, director of the American Bison Association. Outside auditorium talks there were exhibits: Native American art using eagle plumes and the art of Bob Coonts, who over the years provided images for each year's program.

After more than twenty years, my memory of my time that summer in Fort Collins is a bit fuzzy, but I certainly recall the generous hospitality of those overseeing the program and its admirable organization and smooth operation. I remember the audience was large, diverse, and appreciative. There was a vigorous discussion after the talk and a good number of excellent questions. One I recall was from a man who was quite dubious about the estimated number of plains bison—between twenty-four and twenty-seven million at their peak in the 1820s. I have to admit that it's a figure I have had trouble swallowing from time to time, especially given that sixty years later the population had dropped to barely a thousand.

Looking back over the themes and particulars of the dozens of programs during the half century of the American West Program, a few impressions immediately stand out. As an exercise I tried to think of prominent western historians during those years who did not appear on the rosters. I could come up with very few. The list of participants includes several from the founding generation

of the Western History Association: Ray Allen Billington, Rodman Paul, Robert Utley, Richard Maxwell Brown, John Porter Bloom, and others. The next wave of "new western historians" are there, starting with that group's best known figure, Patricia Nelson Limerick, from down the road in Boulder, and including Anne Butler and Margaret Szasz. Then came those I consider the "younger" cohort (although by now I wonder whether they think of themselves that way), among them Thomas Andrews, Ari Kelman, and CSU's own Jared Orsi. This woefully incomplete list is an implied promise that the cream of our rising colleagues will join it in the future.

As you would expect with that changing cast, the programs, in their annual themes and in their particular presentations, reflect the evolution of both scholarly and popular interest in western history and life. The earliest, focusing on the Southwest, Northwest, and Rocky Mountains, came at a time of special awareness that "the West" should really be pluralized—the Wests—recognizing that the region is far and away the nation's most geographically and culturally diverse. Two successive programs (1996 and 1997) brought out a diversity common among the West's parts: its remarkable splay of peoples. The point is largely missed among a public that associates ethnic variety with the Northeast, yet in 1870 and 1880, New York, which had the highest percentage of foreign-born persons of Atlantic coastal states, would have ranked ninth among western states and territories. Speakers made that point with presentations on Japanese, German-Russians, Irish, Basques, Italians, Chinese, and more.

Work in western women's history, which in my opinion was the true opening salvo of the "new" western history, has been increasingly represented, ranging from talks on figures such as the great photographer Evelyn Cameron and the philanthropist Augusta Tabor to an entire program on women's suffrage. (To beg another personal point: that program included a presentation on Anne Ellis, author of the memoir *The Life of an Ordinary Woman*. My wife and I admired Ellis enough to name our daughter after her.) Native Americans have likewise received their due, once again more fully with the passing of the years. Topics have ranged from Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools to the impact of European arrival on Great Plains Natives to far earlier chapters in

the ongoing story, including the elaborate road systems during the Ancestral Puebloan period.

Beyond these areas that have attracted more attention over time, the program has touched on others that, again in my opinion, are ripe for a new and fresher look. A good bit has been written on the mythic West, but the subject is waiting for reexamination. Among others, James Work's presentation on the classic film *Shane,* Anne Butler's on Hollywood's treatment of sex and saloons, and Patricia Limerick's on the varied uses of the term "frontier" were all reminders to me of the enduring lessons we can find in the changing images of the West and frontier in popular culture. The late, great Ferenc Szasz's contribution on the mythic West, asking why there are so few images of clergy in those images, stressed to me that we have paid far too little attention to religion in the lives of westerners—both Euro-American newcomers and Native peoples—and their dozens of religions and cosmologies. There was even a year devoted to what is, let's face it, a subject with a bottomless reservoir of possibilities—western eccentrics.

The American West Program has given us a half century of insights, provocations, and pure enjoyment, including plenty of music and exhibitions to accompany the presentations, that add up to a centerpiece of the study of and reflection on that part of the world, the American West, that has an enduring power to fascinate and challenge us. It has been my privilege to have been one of the scores who have taken part in it.

Of Time Travel, Gratitude, and Prophecy: Reflections on My Participation in the American West Program

Patricia Nelson Limerick

PART ONE
TIME TRAVEL FOR BEGINNERS

Time travel, I learned from writing this essay about my experience giving speeches in Colorado State University's American West Program, does not require the invention of any new technology. It is already well within the reach of human beings.

Here is the process to follow, laid out in six steps for anyone who would like to give this a try. These steps are particularly suited for public speakers, but they can be adapted to anyone who would like to travel hither and thither through time, with the especially entertaining feature of encountering your previous self in different eras.

STEP ONE

Have a great time giving speeches to wonderfully receptive audiences.

STEP TWO

Gather the notes that you used to give those speeches and store them someplace where there is at least a chance that you will be able to find them. Immediately begin forgetting what you said in those speeches.

STEP THREE

Wait a while, maybe two or three decades.

STEP FOUR

Dig out any of the stored notes that you can find.

STEP FIVE
(AND THIS IS WHERE IT GETS A LITTLE MORE COMPLICATED)

As you read over those notes, energetically engage in these surprisingly enjoyable exercises:

a) Experience amazement over the revelation that you once knew the stories and the insights that you are now reading, as if you were not actually their author.
b) Feel sensations of sorrow—perhaps even pain—when you see how poorly thought-out some of your statements were.
c) Wonder if you should try to find a few people who heard you make those statements, so you can apologize to them for the wrongheaded remarks you imposed on them.
d) Experience relief that it is very unlikely that you could find those people in order to apologize.
e) Puzzle over the occasional passages that seem more relevant now than they were when you first presented them; ask yourself if these passages were the products of foresight and prescience or just weird luck. (The right answer is the second one.)

STEP SIX

While there is still time, accept every opportunity to give speeches to receptive and thoughtful audiences so that you will have future opportunities to repeat these steps.

PART TWO
STATEMENT OF GRATITUDE TO A BRAVE WESTERNER

For several years after *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* was published in 1987, I lived in a vortex of controversy. A small, but very vocal, set of older western American historians defended their turf with strong feelings that put civility out of their reach. At the same time, a small, but equally vocal, set of pundits and commentators mistook the author of *Legacy of Conquest* for a threat to the nation.

In 1988, while that storm was still raging, Professor Harry Rosenberg took a calculated risk and invited me to speak in the American West Program at Colorado State University. For reasons that now puzzle me, I chose "Misconceptions of the American West" as the title for my talk, though this was a remarkably poor fit for the season's theme: "Trails West: Explorers and Travelers before 1869." Contemplating the speech title gives me the occasion to report that my preferences in word choice thirty-five years ago were not a permanent fixture of my character. Over the following years, I had the good sense to remove the word "debunking" from my lexicon and to surrender the use of fighting words like "misconceptions," "delusions," and "fallacies." Instead, I shifted to terms that were more likely to arouse good-natured curiosity and less likely to provoke opposition and defensiveness.

I was not and am not a diary keeper, so I cannot be sure of what I thought back in 1988. But I believe it is accurate to say that it took me thirty-five years to arrive at the recognition that Harry Rosenberg was as notable for his bravery as he was for his good nature and graciousness. When he included "the controversial Patricia Nelson Limerick" in the American West Program, he did not suggest that I should temper the tone of my talk title. Instead, he invited me to join the series, and then he left me free to win or lose the audience on my own. And now, in a providential sequence of invitations, Jared Orsi's inclusion of me in this collection gives me the occasion to offer this belated statement of appreciation and gratitude for Harry Rosenberg's grace in navigating the difficult terrain of intergenerational transitions.

PART THREE
A HYPOTHESIS, TESTED AND VALIDATED

For several decades, Colorado State University's American West Program was a brave experiment in the revitalization of effective speaking and writing in the academic world. Here is a hypothesis that this experiment implicitly put to the test:

> *If a program could give individuals repeated opportunities to notice how their habits of using words when speaking to a receptive audience could add spark and energy to their habits of using words in writing, that program could contribute to two important causes: 1) the recovery of the profession of history from the academicizing of historical findings, and 2) the provision of a remedy for the affliction of the historical amnesia that burdens this nation.*

If you review the lineup of speakers and talks in the American West series, and if you then look at the published work of the speakers, you will find a data set that renders this hypothesis verified and validated.

THE FIRST COMPONENT OF THE HYPOTHESIS-VALIDATION OPERATING SYSTEM

Invitations to give speeches to the lively and responsive CSU and Fort Collins audiences offered speakers enviable opportunities to field-test stories, interpretations, and ideas that deserved to find a permanent home in print.

This could—and sometimes did—bring immediate results. But my own experience gives evidence that this could also work over a much longer span of time.

Preparing to write this tribute, I found the full text of my 2002 speech: "Judging Colorado: The Role of the Courts in the Changing West." In a cognitive dysfunction I share with many enthusiastic public speakers, very soon after giving a speech I retain only the foggiest notion of what I said. So it was a surprise—and also a relief!—to discover that the audience on that evening in 2002 had not been cheated. Reading the text that I had successfully

excavated, I found that I had conjured up worthwhile reflections on the portrayal of judges in classic western American fiction. The options for fictional western judges proved to be limited: they could be ineffective, corrupt, or ineffective and corrupt. And then, borrowing (with full attribution) from the work of fellow historians, I moved on to craft some thought-provoking observations on the unsteady ethics of nonfictional territorial judges in the last half of the nineteenth century. This speech also featured quotations that I should have continued to recite for years to come. Here is a spectacular sentence, written by the author of the major biography of Judge Roy Bean, C. L. Sonnichsen: "It looks like the American people have gone shopping for heroes and come home with whatever they could find."

But here is the upshot.

Though it languished for two decades, this speech defied the usual workings of time. When it was released from its captivity in a file box, "Judging Colorado" emerged with a measurable increase in relevance. In truth, rediscovering this speech bore a rather direct resemblance to finding a misplaced stock certificate whose value had soared or perhaps finding an expensive piece of jewelry that had been lost under a sofa cushion.

"Today," I had said in 2002 to explain to the audience why I thought the topic of judges was so important, "we live in an era in which thoughts and feelings about judges and their courts are powerful and conflicting."

As has long been its habit, "today" is a term that refuses to hold still.

In a time of widespread concern over the conduct of U.S. Supreme Court justices and when the hope that the U.S. Supreme Court will acquire an ethics code seems quixotic, the stories and reflections in the speech are primed and ready for a return to the world. So here is another quotation from "Judging Colorado" that looks like I must have written it while pondering the Supreme Court's "image troubles" in 2023:

> But wasn't the theory supposed to be that judges were neutral, above the fray, somehow or other detached from the swirl of history, and positioned to serve society by reviewing evidence and applying law in an utterly non-partisan, disinterested way?

If *that* was the theory, don't expect much support for it from the history of judges in the American West.

Field-tested in 2002 in the American West Program, "Judging Colorado" is ready for a remake and revival in the twenty-first century. Here is one more statement from that speech that volunteers as the first sentence in an op-ed in 2023: "No one can spend much time in contemplating the history of judges in the American West and recapture the simple faith that judges float in serene detachment above history."

THE SECOND COMPONENT OF THE HYPOTHESIS-VALIDATION OPERATING SYSTEM

Speakers in the American West Program gained another important benefit: they had the opportunity to present to a live audience stories and interpretations that had already appeared in print. This provided an effective remedy for the sorrowful fact that an author rarely gets to observe people as they read her published words. Giving a printed and published work a second chance in spoken language does a great deal to boost authorial morale.

This was certainly the case with my initial talk in 1988. That dreary speech title—"Misconceptions of the American West"—could not exercise its power to dampen spirits because I was so happy to be in the presence of a lively and receptive audience as I presented the "greatest hits" from my book, *The Legacy of Conquest*. Writing that book had required endless spells of isolation as sentences and paragraphs cohered slowly into chapters. Having the chance to transform those sentences and paragraphs into spoken words was a major return on investment for those spells of isolation. Best of all, question-and-answer sessions conveyed a range of perspectives worth considering, and lively conversations kept the rooms buzzing after the official end of the evening. (There is no equivalent to this experience when an author sits in a chair in an unpopulated room and looks at the passages they think came out really well.)

My second speech in the American West Program offered a particularly enjoyable experience along these lines. For a book called *The Frontier in American Culture* (1994), I had written an essay called "The Adventures of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century."

This essay carried a serious exploration of the difficulty of separating the words *frontier* and *pioneer* from the point of view tied to westward-moving outsiders. And yet this essay is well supplied—possibly oversupplied!—with humor. To get a better grip on the fate of the words *frontier* and *pioneer* outside of the circles of western American historians, I looked at roughly four thousand headlines from 1988 to 1993.

My findings stretched several stages beyond ridiculous. Here are some of the pioneers I read about in those headlines: the Cookie Pioneer, the Cinnamon Roll Pioneers, the Microwave Popcorn Pioneer, the Pioneer of the South Philadelphia Hoagie, the Pioneer of Fitness Franchising, the Psychedelic Pioneer, the Stainless Steel Cookware Pioneer, the Sex-Change Pioneer, and the Pioneer in Root-Canal Dentistry. And then there was the wondrous phrase I chose for the title of my American West Program talk in 1994,"the Velcro Frontier," which will never lose its grip.

It is entirely possible that a sector of the American West Program audience left that auditorium in 1994 with the determination to keep using the words *frontier* and *pioneer* with the conventional meanings they have carried for years. But I still think that it would have taken an even greater determination to remove every thought of the Cookie Pioneer from their memories, minds, and, perhaps, souls.

THE THIRD COMPONENT OF THE HYPOTHESIS-VALIDATION OPERATING SYSTEM

When I initially asked myself what I appreciated most about the experiences I had as a speaker in the American West Program, that seemed like a tough question.

It turned out to have an easy answer.

Every presentation I gave in the American West Program affirmed the proposition that humor is a legitimate, meaningful, and distinctively disarming item in the toolkit of historians who want to reach wide audiences. Even when (actually, that should be *especially* when) dealing with contentious subjects, humor can serve as the social and cultural equivalent of WD-40, bringing antagonists and opponents together in moments of shared merriment. Even though humor figured in all of my presentations in the American

West Program, I cannot remember a single instant when it went off track and escalated tension. But I can remember plenty of moments when the audience just went with the flow and laughed together.

I take some credit for those wonderful moments. But I give more of the credit to the audiences who made the commitment to attend those lectures and who did not head for the exit, even when they might have wondered where on earth this eccentric—but funny!—speaker was headed next.

PART FOUR
SUMMING THINGS UP: A PROVEN SUCCESS IN PROPHECY

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, I never stopped declaring that the field of western American history was on the edge of a major renaissance. At the time that I made those declarations, I had no reason to think they were accurate.

The American West Program's roster of speakers and speeches makes it clear that I far exceeded the performance record in prophecy of most human beings.

Over the course of a lifetime, I have managed to make one fully validated prediction, and CSU's American West Program played its part in that achievement.

The First Step

Derek R. Everett

Americans have never had much use for history," opined scholar Richard White in 1994, "but we do like anniversaries."[1] There is something ridiculously powerful in recalling on some day or another an event that took place on that same date in years gone by, or knowing that one shares their birthday with some famous figure, or marking a certain number of years since an exact moment of significance. When one of these anniversaries hits a mark ending in zero—such as the fiftieth anniversary of Colorado State University's American West Program—the poignancy intensifies. Indeed, the preceding pages exist because members of CSU's community sought to look back on the AWP from the perspective of half a century. This group of historically minded Americans—myself included—exemplified White's critique. We took advantage of a big anniversary to contemplate and celebrate an experience that has long resonated far beyond the campus in Fort Collins. It falls to me to corral the preceding essays and the perspectives their authors have shared to emphasize the AWP's diverse, vital significance.

The dozens of scholars, artists, reenactors, politicians, and more who have graced the AWP's stage over the years encouraged their listeners to view the region around them in new, more complicated ways. Leisl Carr Childers traces the program's evolution from the early 1970s into the early twenty-first century. She shows how

the AWP offered a chance for CSU to reinvent itself after difficult, often traumatic years rattled campus and shook the world. The program's inaugural season in the summer of 1972 incorporated three-quarters of the university's colleges and inspired nearly four dozen distinct courses in the subsequent academic year.[2] After five years of this frenetic, expansive pace, followed by two years of struggle just to stay alive, the program went moribund until its renaissance in the mid-1980s. This time, the AWP drew upon historians primarily rather than tap into multiple disciplines across the CSU campus. Nonetheless, what the program lost in breadth, it more than made up for in depth.

Carr Childers identifies the AWP's unique contribution to academia. "[I]n all of its configurations," she writes, the program's "organizers have drawn from the best scholarship on the history of the American West, worked to elevate historical actors and stories of the past that are often overlooked, and brought together two fields, public and environmental history, that emerged at the very moment in which the AWP was birthed." Each presenter's information added another thread to the tapestry of western perspectives for the eager audiences assembled before them. This enrichment offers one of the AWP's greatest assets. For half a century it has provided an avenue of learning to ignite the imagination and ensure that CSU made good on its land grant mission to be of service to its community. At its core, the program speaks to a fundamental human desire; to borrow from author and professor Umberto Eco: "To survive, you must tell stories."[3]

Essays in this compendium, chapters by Philip J. Deloria, Elliott West, and Patricia Nelson Limerick, offer scholarly perspective to illustrate the AWP's impact on themselves and their shared field of western history. The program's ability to provide intellectual direction made it a laboratory of sorts, a place where speakers could process partially worked-out ideas as often as they narrated well-established interpretations and get feedback from an engaged audience. As Deloria observes in his essay, his father Vine Deloria Jr. used a 1974 appearance at the program to help shape a clarion call for a more thoughtful, inclusive approach to American Indian history. The AWP offered a platform for intellectuals like Vine Deloria Jr. to hone their craft, "a creative blend of happening and academic program [that] is well worth remembering and celebrating

its generative power and its lasting legacy," as Philip J. Deloria describes. CSU has spent years on the front lines of scholarship about the American West, helping to shape intellectual discourse far and wide.

Universities in the United States often have a reputation for aloofness—the old "ivory tower" put-down. To draw from Umberto Eco again, in the 1980s he observed this notion by arguing that "nothing more closely resembles a monastery (lost in the countryside, walled, flanked by alien, barbarian hordes, inhabited by monks who have nothing to do with the world and devote themselves to their private researches) than an American university campus." Yet the AWP has spent decades challenging this dismissive perspective, providing a popular and engaging forum for Rams as well as the wider flock in Fort Collins and beyond. As a result, the public at large gained access to cutting-edge scholarship that by necessity had to appeal to a broader audience. Such an experience enriched the listeners and encouraged the presenters to make their work appreciable beyond a handful of academics gathered in some bland hotel conference room. Patricia Nelson Limerick emphasizes this welcome opportunity in her essay. By injecting humor into serious topics, Limerick helps her audience connect with the material. Like Deloria, Limerick also notes the value of bouncing ideas off a diverse audience. And she also appreciates getting to run her more polished ideas by attendees, because, as she notes, a scholar rarely gets to watch her readers respond to her writing. This exchange, in which both speaker and audience learned from each other, is the dialogue that the AWP has ingeniously fostered.

The value of the AWP, however, does not lie in its ability to inspire and invigorate its presenters alone. Indeed, perhaps the program's greatest value has been its democratization of knowledge. As an event marketed to all ages and backgrounds, the AWP made a vital impact on thought for those who attended its events. For decades, hundreds of people came to CSU weekly to listen to compelling tales of the American West's past and present. This town and gown event fostered bonds between the campus and its surrounding community, helping to challenge the "ivory tower" notion by making CSU approachable and appealing. Elliott West notes that his 2000 bison talk was but one in a litany of the AWP's

"half century of insights, provocations, and pure enjoyment." West also points out how the program was not just some feel-good nostalgia factory. It explored contemporary controversies revolutionizing western history, preferring to challenge speakers and the audience alike rather than appeal to a simplistic, narrow, stereotypical vision.

If the AWP consisted only of the lectures that captivated audiences on the CSU campus every summer, that might be enough, but its most striking aspect was artistic rather than academic. The program's essential connection to visual art paralleled the program's origins. Its 1972 inaugural event was linked to the centennial of Yellowstone National Park, whose creation owed a great deal to the landscapes of Thomas Moran. The artist joined photographer William Henry Jackson on an 1871 federal survey of Yellowstone. Assumptions that the realism of Jackson's images would help ensure Yellowstone's protection proved less accurate than imagined, however. Moran's glorious landscapes—such as 1872's *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*—captivated imaginations and proved even more inspirational than Jackson's black-and-white photographs. Moran marveled at the scenery as he celebrated it in oil on canvas, declaring that he did "not expect to see any finer general view of the Rocky Mountains" than the vistas he enjoyed there.[5] (Those of us who dwell beneath Longs Peak and Horsetooth Mountain might quibble with that conclusion.) Moran's work, on display in Washington, D.C., convinced federal politicians of Yellowstone's unique glory and secured its preservation. It seems appropriate that the inaugural AWP at CSU in 1972 included an exhibit of Moran's art.

Starting a century after Thomas Moran immortalized Yellowstone and continuing off and on for thirty years through the glory days of the AWP, the striking work of artist Bob Coonts provided an aesthetic spine that helped the program stand tall and proud. As a result, nearly half of this compendium focuses upon Coonts's career and on his poster art and its preservation. Ariel Schnee explores how the artist drew inspiration from his life in the American West for his annual AWP posters. For attendees who purchased prints of them, they proved as popular an element of the program as the lectures. His striking works found their way onto the walls of many local homes, daily visual reminders to their inhabitants of the history they learned through the AWP and an illustration

of how much the denizens of Fort Collins appreciated the program. Coonts's "body of work was a charismatic ambassador to the general public for the academic and cultural conversations that the American West Program facilitated during its heyday," Schnee reminds us. Beyond appreciative patrons who purchased Coonts's posters for decoration, his work has merited protection for posterity. As Patricia Rettig points out in her essay, Coonts's art—including but not limited to the annual depictions he made for the AWP—serves as the seed to an extensive collection of the media at CSU's Morgan Library. Few academic libraries archive posters, but Rettig demonstrates why Coonts's work merits the honor. Indeed, one suspects that the most frequently viewed pages of this compendium will be the chronological presentation of his posters. They serve as the program's brassy overture, the call to attention for compelling presentations to come.

For half a century, CSU's AWP has inspired its presenters and enriched its audiences. It also speaks to the university's mission as defined by the Morrill Act of 1862, the land grant policy that laid the foundation for such institutions. Intended to promote practical education in agriculture and mechanical arts, the act emphasized higher education of service to broadly defined communities and not just a few elite students. The law described schools like what is now CSU as intended "to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life."[6] A program open to all for free to promote the debate and diffusion of knowledge hearkens powerfully to the university's philosophical foundation. My essay exploring the 2002 AWP in particular demonstrates this. The hundreds of people from CSU's neighboring communities who came weekly to campus for a lecture on a summer evening illustrates this town and gown triumph. It made the campus a destination for residents of Fort Collins and beyond, not just a landmark to drive by. The AWP reflected and embraced CSU's responsibility to both produce cutting-edge scholarship and distribute it to its neighborhood and beyond. Few programs in the country accomplished so much on both levels at the same time. Indeed, tracing the myriad impacts of the AWP over the years for people on both sides of the podium seems as challenging as tracking the ripples in a pond after a stone is tossed into it.

Every February 11, CSU celebrates its most cherished anniversary,

Founders Day, the university's birthday—which suggests that Richard White was on to something. On that date in 1870, Colorado's territorial governor, Edward McCook, signed legislation "for the establishment and location of an Agricultural College" in the vicinity of Fort Collins. This law represented the territory's claim to land assigned via the Morrill Act, adopted eight years earlier. That same day, the territorial legislature memorialized Congress to ask for a transfer of the land on which the military post of the same name as the town had stood. Lawmakers noted that the War Department abandoned Fort Collins several years prior, but federal law prevented any development of the site, an awkward situation since a small town had risen around it. The legislators noted that never again would the post be activated for military purposes, though. They noted that the site "was withdrawn from pre-emption and settlement as an outpost for the protection of the surrounding settlers from the incursions of hostile Indians."[8] Colorado politicos assumed that crisis had dissipated in the wake of the gruesome Sand Creek Massacre in 1864, hence the reasoning to transfer the military land to the territory as part of its educational land grant. Thus, Founders Day represents an opportunity not only to celebrate but also to reflect on the brutal legacy that underpins the university's existence.

In the past few years, CSU has faced up to this challenging reality. The university's existence depends upon the displacement of cultures that had lived for generations where its buildings and stadiums and bighorn sheep statues now stand. In 2019, inspired by other institutions of higher education and organizations both civic and private across the United States, CSU declared its Land Acknowledgment:

> Colorado State University acknowledges, with respect, that the land we are on today is the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute Nations and peoples. This was also a site of trade, gathering, and healing for numerous other Native tribes. We recognize the Indigenous peoples as original stewards of this land and all the relatives within it. As these words of acknowledgment are spoken and heard, the ties Nations have to their traditional homelands are renewed and reaffirmed.

> CSU is founded as a land-grant institution, and we accept that our mission must encompass access to education and inclusion. And, significantly, that our founding came at a dire cost to Native Nations and peoples whose land this University was built upon. This acknowledgment is the education and inclusion we must practice in recognizing our institutional history, responsibility, and commitment.[9]

Ever since its adoption, the Land Acknowledgment precedes most public events at CSU, a recognition of the university's contested legacy. It is a commitment to show through word and deed a comprehension of that past. Not just on the anniversary of Founders Day, but throughout the year, our collective mind looks backward to admit inexcusable wrongs while looking forward to contribute to a nation and a world with greater opportunity for people from every background. The American West Program, with its historic and recent emphasis on diverse programming, offers the perfect venue for CSU to embrace this challenge, a commemoration of a place and its ability to define those who live there across time.

Historians are trained to think of the contemporary world not as the fated result of a parade of past events but just the most recent chapter, with countless more to come. As Richard White observed, it is easy to be seduced by the emotional appeal of an anniversary like a semicentennial, the AWP's half-century mark that inspired this compendium and the corresponding exhibit of Bob Coonts's evocative poster art. But the value of the AWP lies not just in looking backward but in looking forward. According to an unnamed reporter in CSU's *Rocky Mountain Collegian* in the summer of 1972, that year's inaugural program offered "the first step in what may turn CSU into a major national center for Western American Studies."[10] To some it may seem frustrating to look back from the distance of five decades and feel like the AWP never quite developed into what its founding generation intended. Several times, the steam leaked out of the program's boiler and slowed it nearly to a halt. But in the grand scheme of things, fifty years is nothing. Those of us who toil today in the hallowed halls at CSU, as faculty or student or staff or administrator, are not the university's conclusive chapter. We are just the latest chapter, with even more dynamic and compelling ones to be written in the generations to

come. Recognizing the knotty legacy of the university's land grant mission, the AWP stands as one of the university's great assets to be of respectful, responsible service to a diverse audience—and to help the university learn from them as well. The "first step" that the reporter described in 1972 was taken on a path without an end, and countless miles remain to traverse. With Colorado State University's full support and enthusiasm and confidence, recognizing its rich legacy and limitless potential, the American West Program likewise has many more stories to tell.

Notes

1. Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," in *The Frontier in American Culture,* ed. James R. Grossman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 7.
2. *Rocky Mountain Collegian,* June 15, 1972, 14.
3. Umberto Eco, *The Island of the Day Before* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 207.
4. Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1986), 83.
5. "Thomas Moran's Diary—Page 3," Yellowstone National Park, National Park Service, posted June 3, 2015, accessed July 22, 2023, https://home.nps.gov/yell/learn/historyculture/moransdiarypage3.htm.
6. "Morrill Act (1862)," National Archives, accessed July 22, 2023, https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/morrill-act#transcript.
7. General Laws of Colorado Territory, Eighth Legislative Assembly, 1870, 158.
8. Ibid., 169.
9. "Land Acknowledgment," Colorado State University, accessed July 24, 2023, https://landacknowledgment.colostate.edu/.
10. *Rocky Mountain Collegian,* June 15, 1972, 14.

Acknowledgments

The editors of this volume would like to acknowledge with gratitude the many people who have contributed to it.

Many thanks to the authors, who thoughtfully reflected on different facets of the American West Program (AWP) and shared those insights in the chapters here.

Thanks also to the Center for Literary Publishing staff—center director Stephanie G'Schwind and graduate assistants Jake Friedman and Amy Gordon—for their professional skill in editing, design, and layout.

We are much indebted to Ben Withers, dean of the Colorado State University College of Liberal Arts (CLA), for funding the project and to Jason Frazier, professor of graphic design in the Department of Art and Art History, for hosting an anniversary exhibition of Bob Coonts's American West Program posters in conjunction with the 2022 Colorado International Invitational Poster Exhibition. CSU's Department of Special Collections digitized its holdings of Bob Coonts's posters and provided the files for the exhibition and for this book; thanks especially to the manager of the poster collection, Patricia Rettig.

For administrative support, we are grateful to Allison Pine, assistant to the history department chair, to Eden Trujillo, CLA budget manager, and to Jenna Milliman, CLA HR liaison. Thank you to Robert Gudmestad, history department chair, for his ongoing support of the AWP and this volume.

Finally, we thank Anne Bond, the late Harry Rosenberg, and Dan Tyler and all the people who made the AWP run for decades.

Gratefully,
Leisl Carr Childers
Derek R. Everett
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Bob Coonts earned a bachelor of arts degree with a concentration in graphic design and painting from Colorado State University in 1963. He served as affiliate faculty there from 1971 to 2003, for much of which time, he was the designer of posters for the American West Program. He paints, sculpts, and dreams in his home studio north of Fort Collins, where he and his wife, Sallie, live near a lake with a view of the magnificent Rocky Mountains.

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This book is set in Futura and Sabon
by The Center for Literary Publishing
at Colorado State University.

Cover Image: “Untitled,” Bob Coonts, 1982.
Cover design, book design, and typesetting by Jake Friedman.
Copyediting by Amy Gordon.
Printing by Books International.



With essays by

LEISL CARR CHILDERS • PHILIP J. DELORIA
DEREK R. EVERETT • PATRICIA NELSON LIMERICK
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