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The Capitalist-Marxist Dichotomy within the Hudson River School: Conceptualizing American Property through the Career of Worthington Whittredge (1820-1910)

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The Capitalist-Marxist Dichotomy within the Hudson River School: Conceptualizing American Property through the Career of Worthington Whittredge (1820-1910)

by

Astrid G. Tvetenstrand

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Master’s Degree in American Fine and Decorative Art Sotheby’s Institute of Art 2017

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The Hudson River School artistic movement has been regarded as one of the foremost examples of American painting. These images of landscape have embodied the spirit of the United States and its perpetually changing relationship with nature. While these nineteenth-century paintings are consistently analyzed through the lenses of Romanticism and Idealism, there is a lacuna in the narrative which accentuates economic and political philosophies as important influencers of these works. The impact of capitalism and Marxism is identifiable through not only the country’s economic system, but also the nation’s artistic movements. These theories are well-defined by paintings highlighting northeastern agrarianism and those promoting Manifest Destiny through westward artistic ventures. This thesis explores these ideologies through the career of noted Hudson River School artist, Worthington Whittredge (1820-1910). His oeuvre, autobiography, and career, serve as a pragmatic case study focusing on the connections between American conceptions of property and depictions of the physical landscape of the country. Concentrating on the relationship between individual versus national property, as emphasized by Whittredge’s landscape paintings, stresses the socioeconomic and political foundations for the United States thematically permeated the Hudson River School artistic movement.
# Table of Contents

List of Illustrations…………………………………………………………………………………...i

Acknowledgements………………………………………………………………………………...iii

Introduction  The Foundational Idealism within Past Analyses of American Landscape Painting and Laying the Groundwork for Socioeconomic Debate……….1

Chapter One  Capitalism and the Hudson River School: Determining the Value of the American Self in Terms of Individual Property Ownership and Landscape Painting………………………………………………………11

Chapter Two  Marxism and the Hudson River School: Contextualizing a National Property through Artistic Exemplifications of Dialectical Materialism…44

Conclusion  The Illumination of an Artistic Dichotomy: The Intersection of Polarizing Philosophies within American Landscape Painting……………………………………...76

Illustrations……………………………………………………………………………………………79

Bibliography……………………………………………………………………………………………88
List of Illustrations

Fig. 1.1  John Smibert, Francis Brinley, 1729, oil on canvas, 50 x 39 ¼ in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York

Fig. 1.2  Ralph Earl, Esther Boardman, 1789, oil on canvas, 42 ½ x 32 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York

Fig. 1.3  Thomas Cole, View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow, 1836, oil on canvas, 51 ½ x 76 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York

Fig. 1.4  Worthington Whittredge, Landscape with Hay Wain, 1861, oil on canvas, 15 13/16 x 30 11/16 in., Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio

Fig. 1.5  Worthington Whittredge, The Clam Diggers, 1866, oil on canvas, 10 ½ x 23 7/10 in., Private Collection

Fig. 1.6  Worthington Whittredge, A Home by the Seaside, 1872, oil on canvas, 20 x 31 1/16 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California

Fig. 1.7  Worthington Whittredge, Old Homestead by the Sea, 1883, oil on canvas, 21 7/8 x 31 7/8 in., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Boston, Massachusetts

Fig. 1.8  Worthington Whittredge, Harvest Time: Summer in Farmington Valley, 1900, oil on canvas, 15 ¼ x 22 7/8 in., Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey

Fig. 2.1  Charles Willson Peale, George Washington, ca. 1779-81, oil on canvas, 95 x 61 ¾ in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York

Fig. 2.2  Frederic Edwin Church, Niagara, 1857, oil on canvas, 40 x 90 ½ in., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 2.3  Worthington Whittredge, Encampment on the Platte River, 1865, oil on canvas, 12 ¾ in x 16 ½ in., American Museum of Western Art- the Anschutz Collection, Denver, Colorado

Fig. 2.4  Worthington Whittredge, Indian Encampment, 1870-76, oil on canvas, 14 ½ x 22 in., Private Collection

Fig. 2.5  Worthington Whittredge, Crossing the Platte River, 1872-74, oil on canvas, 40 x 60 ½ in., the White House, Washington, D.C.
Fig. 2.6  Worthington Whittredge, *On the Plains*, 1872, oil on canvas, 30 x 50 in., St. Johnsbury Atheneum, St. Johnsbury, Vermont
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“Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson
Introduction
The Foundational Idealism within Past Analyses of American Landscape Painting and Laying the Groundwork for Socioeconomic Debate

If art in America is ever to receive any distinctive character so that we can speak to an American School of Art, it must come from this new condition, the close intermingling of the peoples of the earth in our particular form of government. In this I have some hope for the future of American Art. We are a very young nation to stand as well as we do in art compared with the people of the old world. Our young artists, especially the landscape painters, are experimenting.¹

The sentiments of Worthington Whittredge (1820-1910) speak to a broader mindset symbolic of the nineteenth-century American. Through art, an exploration of the societal make-up of the United States was principally articulated. The American landscape painters are representative of a collective group which pragmatically illustrated attitudes regarding the state of America. While idealistic at heart, these painters could not completely divorce themselves from the socioeconomics of their country. Whittredge was keen to communicate the “peoples” relationship with “earth” and “government” operated congruently, ultimately creating an “American School of Art.”² His statements enforce the two fields cannot be separated in a discussion of the emergence and prominence of a period of art known as the Hudson River School. While his convictions are filled with Romanticism and Idealism, they also acknowledge that American art cannot operate without a corresponding intellectual merger between society and its government.³

The paintings of the Hudson River School movement expose this framework and present consistent portrayals of man, industrialization, and the physical landscape of America. These depictions of landscape speak to a discussion of both national and individual ownership of property. Defining a national art cannot occur without referencing and admitting the influences inherent within the categorization. Nations are comprised of governments, economies, and people. To accept a national art is to further admit the thematic construction of subjects within paintings allows for the promotion of these distinctive facets upon canvases. Basic principles relating to the creation of nations are intertwined with artistic representations and in this vein, American art expresses political and economic philosophies which have been present since the nation’s conception. With an individual’s right to land ownership and property as an idea inherent in the formation of America, these principles are present within the nation’s artistic movements. Two polarizing ideologies are fostered at the very origin of American society and subsequently, are highlighted in landscape painting. Through the simultaneous existence of capitalist and Marxist socioeconomic philosophies, nineteenth-century perceptions concerning American property thematically permeated the Hudson River School artistic movement.

In order to find connections between these political and economic theories and art, it is imperative to understand the origins of the Hudson River School, as well as past analyses which have dominated discussions. Most scholars believe the artistic movement began in 1825, with the discovery of the “father of the movement,” Thomas Cole (1801-
Cole’s breakthrough as a landscape painter coincided with the opening of the Erie Canal. With the emergence of the Hudson River as a source of national fiscal prosperity and commercial use, the beginnings of the artistic group overlapped with the establishment of a viable industrialized framework for the economy of America. Through the advancement and success of Cole, nineteenth-century landscape painting was correspondingly able to grow and flourish. The intersecting of these two moments in history substantiates the artistic beginnings of the Hudson River School have always been intertwined with the socioeconomic progress of America. As Asher Durand (1796-1886) rose to president of the National Academy of Design in 1845, the movement progressed into its peak years of popularity and concurrently expressed the pecuniary sentiments of nineteenth-century Americans.

The relationship between man and the nineteenth-century American landscape are often analyzed through the lens of Romanticism. This interplay between art and literature in American landscape painting was recognized by art historian, Barbara Novak. In her book, *Nature and Culture*, first published in 1980, she wrote:

Revelation and creation, the sublime as a religious idea, science as a mode of knowledge to be urgently enlisted on God’s side—with these the artist, approaching a nature in which his society had located powerful vested interests, was already in a difficult position. In painting landscape, the artist was tampering with some of his society’s most touchy ideas, ideas involved in many of its pursuits. Any irresponsibility on his part might result in a kind of excommunication. The nineteenth century rings with exhortations to the artist on the high moral duties of his exceptional calling—entirely proper for landscape painters, those priests of the natural church. There is no question, in early-nineteenth-century America, of the

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intimate relation between art and society, a fact that has to be emphasized after a century of modernism.\(^7\)

Through Novak’s analysis, the premise of the discussion is centered around connecting these works with the corresponding Romantic artistic movement. Her analysis brings forth the relationship between art and society, making it a central component of nineteenth-century landscape painting. What is lost here are the economic frameworks essential to societies and how they implicitly frame the analysis. The notion of the sublime and religion are extensively investigated and the focus is upon the Romantic components which are visually apparent. Her writing places the artist at an intellectual convergence between the industrial and the religious, exposing the focus of preceding discussions about the Hudson River School. However, Novak does not remove her argument from what she refers to as the “vested interests of society.”\(^8\) This societal capital was driven by the expansion of America, associating the Hudson River School with the continued economic growth of the country and providing evidence that the groundwork for this argument has continuously saturated preceding analyses.

The term “Hudson River School” was disparagingly given by Clarence Cook (1828-1900) in 1879. Cook was a critic writing for the New York Herald.\(^9\) In reaction to Cook’s comments, artist Worthington Whittredge, then president of the National Academy of Design, stated, “This critic probably never reflected that the Hudson River School, if it were a school, must have something distinctive about it and instead of the

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term being as he intended, a term of ridicule, it might become a term of approbation.”

It is evident Whittredge had substantial influence at the end of the Hudson River School and consequently, he provides an all-encompassing case study, supplying the means for a philosophical debate concerning the mindset of nineteenth-century America. While he was not as impressive as Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900) in terms of skill or as industrious in his promotion of ideas like Thomas Cole and Asher Durand, he was diligent in his commitment to painting the American landscape and his existence as a member of this artistic group. He was a symptom of the movement, a conscientious interpreter of the aesthetics and beliefs encouraged by these painters. He reflects nineteenth-century society and in the study of a singular artist, broader themes can be applied to others within the movement. Whittredge provides a mere subset of a larger argument implicating the Hudson River School as a contextual, artistic interpretation of American perceptions of land ownership, wealth, and property. Throughout Whittredge’s career, the philosophies of capitalism and Marxism are apparent in his representations of landscape and their implicative associations promoting both individual and American property are thematically discernable.

Property and landscape are synonymous in this argument. The landscape of America works as the corresponding national property. A meaningful asset for a country, wealth is gained through a society’s accumulation of property. As the United States acquired and explored land during the nineteenth-century, the meaning behind this addition to American culture became increasingly significant. In this respect, the Hudson River School’s depictions of the American landscape are a congruent result of the

10 John K. Howat, The Hudson River and Its Painters, 27.
nation’s establishment of a shared commodity. The exemplification of the American landscape was a consequence of the nation’s ability to succeed in its expansion. In the heralding of this agrarian materialism, the relationship between man and his government was exposed through the Hudson River School. Within the career of Worthington Whittredge, this is epitomized in his paintings of the American West.

Simultaneously, these images present a multivalent contextualization of the self. Through an individual’s link with the physical landscape of the United States, artistic allusions permanently connected an American’s success with the ownership of property. To this day, Americans subscribe to an “American Dream” mentality, closely determining their personal success with the accumulation of wealth primarily gained through land ownership. These societal ideas are evident from well before the formation and expansion of the United States. Accordingly, this theme remains in the composition of American art as a subject matter, and the idea saturates the Hudson River School. As many of Worthington Whittredge’s paintings present man and nature within this same scope, the narrative regarding the individual proposes associative connotations between a single person’s connection with the land as a marker of wealth and personal consequence.

This thesis seeks to explore these two realms in which the Hudson River School economically related to the landscape of America. Subsequently, it is divided into two chapters with subchapters embedded in each section. The first, deals with property and the relationship between capitalism and Worthington Whittredge’s paintings. It speaks to the thematic origins of capitalism in America and specifically, how the ideology found its way into the routine perceptions and depictions of society. This chapter begins a foundational discussion regarding Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*, originally
published in 1776, and how modern capitalism was influenced by English society. As Smith’s text has continued influence on American economics, it provides a logical start for the conversation. A juxtaposition is made relating the New England Puritans in comparison to Smith’s theories, elucidating the beginnings of capitalism in America.

This chapter also focuses on the preliminary examples of the economic and political system within American landscape painting. I will discuss the associative qualities of the American landscape as seen in early New England portraiture and continue the discussion into the beginnings of the Hudson River School. Accordingly, my argument will be framed around the individual’s affiliation with personal property and how these connotations were epitomized in the beginning of colonial American painting. The combination of these two themes allows the viewer to see representations of capitalism within American art.

Through the lens of capitalism, I will investigate the paintings of Worthington Whittredge and their inferential connection with an individual’s ownership of American property. This will be explored through an examination of specific events in Whittredge’s career and specific paintings. Primarily looking at his works localized in upstate New York and New England, I will use the fundamental texts discussed earlier to connect the mindset of nineteenth-century America to how these perceptions were articulated in his paintings. I will further discuss Whittredge’s own career and how it epitomizes my central argument regarding the capitalistic nature of American landscape painting. It

12 Alan B. Krueger, "Introduction," in The Wealth of Nations, by Adam Smith and Edwin Cannan (New York, NY: Bantam Classic, 2003), xvii. Adam Smith’s work has continued importance in American society as it is a foundational text for many introductory classes in economics. It explores the key factors imperative for economic growth in societies and furthermore, relates to the importance of the individual within the private and public spheres. The text provides a framework for American economics and is used to this day for instructional and applicative measures.
would be impossible for capitalism not to have emerged among the themes presented in his paintings as his career is a manifestation of the ideas within this movement. I will use this chapter to explore paintings which are reflective of these themes. Whittredge’s oeuvre serves as an echo of an overarching societal narrative. This case study speaks to the height of the Hudson River School movement and provides examples for the inherent capitalism within nineteenth-century American landscape painting.

This chapter concludes with a discussion about how Whittredge’s career suggests capitalist themes permeated the works of other Hudson River School artists. As Whittredge traveled with Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902) and Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823-1880), his autobiography provides context which associates these artists with property representations and the American landscape.\textsuperscript{13} Whittredge’s connections speak about a broader societal dialogue regarding the Hudson River School and capitalism. This part of his career further emphasizes Whittredge as an indication of the supreme influence of an overarching American vision. Too often we are inclined to believe artists operated within a singular and insular bubble. We forget they interacted with contemporaries and gained inspiration from discussions with fellow painters. To ignore the people who influenced Whittredge would be foolish, as it would overlook not only a principal element of his career, but also a central characteristic of the Hudson River School. This discussion seeks to show how the individual exemplifies the group and present how Whittredge fits into a broader capitalist theme.

Chapter two of this thesis explores the thematic connection between Marxism and the Hudson River School through Whittredge’s career. Studying the artistic movement

\textsuperscript{13} Whittredge, \textit{The Autobiography of Worthington Whittredge, 1820-1910}, 54.
through this lens provides a counter argument to the first section. Through the differing position, a complete and complex collocation is made successfully highlighting the consistent contradictions inherent within the way Americans create art. The chapter begins by exploring the origins of Marxism in the United States. While the political ideology slightly postdates the beginnings of the Hudson River School, this thesis asserts that Marxism in America is a part of a trans-historical narrative. It is a way of thinking which has always existed, yet only later given an explicit definition.

The chapter discusses preliminary examples of American painting which can be viewed through the lens of this ideology. Marxism will be explored through diverse illustrations of the American landscape. This will also bring forth the thematic discussion of property. Through a Marxist stance, the implied meaning behind artistic renderings of property becomes contrasting and speaks to the innate psyche of America. This reinforces the argument that Marxist themes have always been prevalent in American art and introduces its permeation into the Hudson River School through the career of Worthington Whittredge. His paintings of the American West are the preeminent examples of how Marxism infiltrated American art during the nineteenth-century. The subjective argument is advertised through man’s connection with the West. As Americans continued their quest for industrialization through Manifest Destiny, the story these paintings divulge entertains Marxist insinuations. The ideology is documented through the writings of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and seen in an analysis of his *Capital* and *The German Ideology* against Whittredge’s paintings.14

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14 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to The Critique of Political Economy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998). This text serves as a foundational resource for studies in Marxism. It discusses property and furthermore, the way people connect and associate with the concept.
Much like the first part, the analysis of Whittredge’s career through the Marxist lens must also be contextualized through his relationship with other Hudson River School artists. Emphasizing Whittredge as a case study is essential throughout this thesis, as it allows for the achievement of a wider conversation. From the specific to the expansive, comprehensive analysis of these themes will be articulated through this thesis.
Chapter One
Capitalism and the Hudson River School: Determining the Value of the American Self in Terms of Individual Property Ownership and Landscape Painting

The Origins of Capitalism in America

The origins of capitalism in American society rely heavily upon the country’s cultural faithfulness to its British counterpart. Since its inception, America has had a deeply ingrained, almost dogmatic adherence to the principles of capitalism. These sentiments are attributable to historical precedents British intellectuals created. Distinguishing components of the American societal structure are credited to British assertions about capitalism. While the rhetoric is foundationally British through the opinions of leading economic thinkers of the eighteenth-century, the implemental origins of the system in the United States can be traced to the seventeenth-century beginnings of the New England colonies.\footnote{Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America and Two Essays on America, trans. Gerald E. Bevan, comp. Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 80.  de Tocqueville’s text looks at the history of changes in social conditions in America. He examined the ways in which men found themselves to be increasingly upon an equal socioeconomic playing field. Much of his argument begins with the New England settlers and specifically, the Puritans as the origins for equality in America. Through both education and economy, de Tocqueville argued that the society began a foundation for economic and political freedom. He referred to this as the “Puritan Founding.”}  The correlation of thought and action is logical, as the early New England settlers were seeking perhaps the most American construct of all, private property ownership. A moderately foreign concept to the English, in the American colonies, localized theories are put into place as part of a trans-historical narrative. The New England colonists practiced the ideologies articulated by those that came after and provided an early American example. While the writings of Adam Smith (1723-1790) coincided with the chronologically later American Revolution, the provocations for the system are unmistakable and applicable to the New England settlers’ beginnings upon the American landscape.
The Puritans created an introductory model for Americans which heralded individual work as an indispensable part of determining self-worth. Instilling this perception in people’s minds at the start of colonial life began the sociopolitical groundwork for capitalism. As America progressed to a place which could sustain itself, ready to part from its British owners, the question of an American self-worth was defined through ties to the physical landscape of the country. Hardened and tasked with cultivating an existence in an unforgiving place forced these New England settlers to rely upon a natural individualism. Situational independence propelled the mindset of Americans to be primed for ownership of the place in which they lived. This concept of the self was documented by nineteenth-century French political thinker, Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859). He stated in his 1835 publication, *Democracy in America*, “Among a democratic people, where there is no hereditary wealth, every man works to earn a living.... Labor is held in honor; the prejudice is not against but in its favor.”

Regarding America, this aligns with the nation’s start with capitalism. As colonial Americans derived personal success through their ability to work and their capacity to use the land to realize a value for their labors, sociopolitical themes were seen with the same amount of value as those with religious undertones.

de Tocqueville’s nineteenth-century statements correspond with Puritanical attitudes about property and wealth. Labor as an entity which inherently supplied the value of the individual is applicable to Puritan communities. These early colonial Americans stringently believed in an individualistic, economic approach to property.

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They further felt that personal success was directly linked to the goodness of an individual. Thus, a financially successful person was also believed worthy of God’s salvation. This idea of individualism is pertinent to the themes sponsored by capitalism. Personal work and growth being tied to an individual approach to property expresses similar arguments. Through this lens, the rhetoric of de Tocqueville and the beliefs of the Puritans exposes parallels and promotes that the economic foundations of America were interweaved with a capitalist narrative. Correspondingly, it supports that capitalism permeated the dialogue regarding the country from the seventeenth to the nineteenth-century.

The ability to achieve success through personal economic triumph allowed for the continuation of American life, materializing a key piece behind the rationale of the American Revolution. A text which inspired much of Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence was George Mason’s Virginia Declaration of Rights, written June 12, 1776. In Section 1, Mason states, “That all men are by nature equally free and independent and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.”

Property as a precept which defines an individual within society is expressed in the Virginian document and it sponsors the

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18 George Mason, "The Virginia Declaration of Rights," National Archives and Records Administration, Section 1, accessed June 23, 2016, http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/virginia_declaration_of_rights.html. This text has been referred to as an intensive influence upon Thomas Jefferson’s writing of the Declaration of Independence. The subtle removal of the term “property” in Jefferson’s writing has been noted as the idea of Benjamin Franklin. Franklin asserted that property was a “creature of society” and should be removed from government. Despite Franklin’s individual belief, the Virginia Declaration of Rights provides contextual support for the notion that the ownership of property was a central belief ingrained in the minds of Americans during the time of their revolution.
capitalistic notion that the acquisition of property has continuously existed as a dynamic measure of American goals. The type of democracy the United States was founded upon was associated with the principles of capitalism.

The themes imbued by the historical precedent were not lost on the predominant British philosophers of the eighteenth-century. Adam Smith’s 1776 text, *The Wealth of Nations*, documents the positive outcomes of a capitalist society and articulates the sentiments concurrently embedded in American philosophy. Smith’s influence upon contemporary American economics cannot be denied, and his opinions remain as structural codes for the society. His writings permeated the American mindset and filled the country with ideals upholding the merits of capitalism. His thoughts regarding the individual allude to the nature of Americans and the way they perceive themselves as a people. Smith penned,

> The natural effort of every individual to better his own condition...is so powerful, that it is alone, and without any assistance, not only capable of carrying on the society to wealth and prosperity, but of surmounting a hundred impertinent obstructions with which the folly of human laws too often encumbers its operations.  


19

Through this text, the correlation between the early stages of American national culture and Smith’s work becomes increasingly evident. The individual as a source of personal betterment and the obstructions created by governments are pronounced. This theme is revealing of capitalism as a critical idea throughout the ideological start of America. It is seen in the complex relationship between Britain and America and furthermore, heightened in significance when realizing the weight this concept had within the two-place’s separation. Self-interest and subjective motivation were driving forces behind

economic success. When studying American attitudes toward labor, the influence of Adam Smith is thematically ubiquitous.

Smith’s arguments find their way into assertions upon property and easily relate to the notion that a capitalist society cannot function without ingrained knowledge which links the constructs critical function. Smith states, “The property which every man has in his own labour, as it is the original foundation of all other property, so it is the most sacred and inviolable.”\(^\text{20}\) This statement implies all ownership begins with the entrenched fact that the most useful form of property is the skill of the individual. From there, all other forms of property, i.e. land, can exist and are heightened in value as a direct result of how they were attained. Here, the term “value” is representative of both self-worth and monetary advantages. The fact that Adam Smith’s text influenced the growth and progression of America makes it evident his capitalist theories saturated the socioeconomic make-up of the nation. The implied relationship between the self and property is promoted as a driving force of personal prosperity and importance. While worth originates with the skill of the man, what is accomplished with this ability allows for the consumption of other property, therein achieving fiscal and private success.

This rhetoric persisted in the nineteenth-century through prominent American economists and philosophers. President of Brown University and economist, Francis Wayland (1796-1865), continued this discussion of property in his 1837 work, *The Elements of Political Economy*. He stated, “as soon as land with all other property is divided, a motive exists for regular and voluntary labor, inasmuch as the individual

knows that he, and not his indolent neighbor, will reap the fruit of his toil.”21 This idea corresponds with those of Smith. Property as a motivator and provider for the individual is concept which pervaded the nineteenth-century. Furthermore, the idea of the self is a perpetual theme throughout the history of American society. The individual as the singular motivator sponsors the basis of capitalism. Wayland and Smith’s rhetoric is thematically synonymous, further proving the constant weight the economic ideology maintained. Additionally, Wayland believed the government should operate to protect the individual’s inherent right to property. He argued the rewards of human labor were tied to property rights and as such, it is evident that Smith’s ideas continued to saturate different areas of American society. 22 The link amongst Smith, capitalism, and the nineteenth-century is visually enunciated throughout American artistic endeavors.

Influential Beginnings of Capitalism in American Art

The capitalist origins for American art are first realized in colonial portraiture. While one may find it perplexing to assert that the start of land ownership and property was articulated through portraits, the evidence supporting this theory is convincing. Through early American portraiture, the inherent connection between an individual and personal wealth was conveyed by the portrayal of landscape in the background of these scenes. This idea is seen throughout the colonies but can be localized to portraiture in New England. The industrious area of the United States takes center stage for the development of this concept within painting. While the tradition of adding landscape in

the background of portraiture has roots in Dutch paintings, the meanings behind the representations are decidedly different. As colonial America grew economically, the associations for these landscapes behind figures gradually became more about the attributions of personal property and less about the traditions of an influencing culture.

The capitalist association of personal wealth and property was visually enunciated in John Smibert’s (1688-1751) portrait, Francis Brinley, 1729 (Figure 1.1). While the culmination of the theme is seen in the inclusion of the landscape, the painting’s suggestion of the topic begins with the rendering of the man. The existence of a market for portraiture, a luxury good, implies for the accumulation of wealth in the colonies during the early eighteenth-century. It further displays the desire for portraits was fueled largely by the amassing of substantial personal fortunes. This painting shows both the growth of capitalism and the origins of property associated with depictions of landscape.

Capitalism is first alluded to in the locality of Smibert’s subject matter. Boston, Massachusetts presents a New England setting which exhibits a growing marketplace and the progress of the American economy. The area became influential for English imports to permeate the American market. Portraiture such as Smibert’s Francis Brinley speaks to this economic narrative and projects the growing desire for Americans to acquire commercial goods. Wealth and status are insinuated, as Smibert presented the sitter in

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24 Carrie Rebora Barratt, "Faces of a New Nation: American Portraits of the 18th and Early 19th Centuries," The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 61, no. 1 (2003): 10, doi:10.2307/3269104. Barratt explains the importance of portraiture in colonial America as a marker of status for the sitter as well as the artist. The ability to maintain a career as well as the ability to promote one's own self-worth through artistic representations remains a central theme in her discussion of this rendering by Smibert.
fine textiles. These imply the sitter had financial stability and the luxury to possess non-essential goods. The life suggested by Smibert is one of personal prosperity and individual advancement in Boston. The ability to buy a portrait plays into this suggestive narrative and it indicates one of the discernable markers of status during the early eighteenth-century. In this representation, Mr. Brinley shows not only a visual representation of his material property, but he also plays into the physical ownership of a portrait as a commercial good.\(^{25}\) This idea is wholly capitalist in ideology, as it sponsors that private ownership fueled the American economy. In Brinley’s purchase of a portrait by Smibert, he is further promoting the artist’s business and personal success.

Additionally, in the depiction of this portly man, there is an inference made in regards to the sitter’s power and financial prowess. The relationship between Francis Brinley and this notion is realized in the presentation of his clothing and furniture. These materials make note of not only Brinley’s wealth, but also America’s burgeoning economy. As textiles would have been imported, the idea of trade is promoted through Brinley’s coat. The Queen Anne armchair further fosters this story about Francis Brinley and his relationship to higher social classes.\(^{26}\) The facets articulated in this scene endorse early capitalism in America. They display a union between the individual and the economy. As it promotes the basic components of the ideology, this concept is an example of self-worth and personal reputation gained through the industry of an individual.


\(^{26}\) Carrie Rebora Barratt, "Faces of a New Nation: American Portraits of the 18th and Early 19th Centuries," 10.
The overarching capitalist feature of Smibert’s portrait is the glorification of the landscape, otherwise known as Francis Brinley’s property. The strategically placed background is thematically indicative of more than a pleasant scene. The land illustrated was where Brinley built his estate and consequently, validated his fiscal claim upon America. While the features of the image are reliant on English influences, the same can be said for the political system. Until the American revolution, English ideals filled the American mindset, ultimately laying the groundwork for these perceptions about property. However, the separation of the two countries geographic locations required Americans to create a unique way of relating to land. The land in America became progressively economic in meaning. This principle works in direct contrast to the hereditary implications of land ownership promoted abroad. The landscape rendered in this portrait is a view into Boston from Francis Brinley’s Datchet House residence. This land is emblematic of Francis Brinley’s economic successes rather than his hereditary position. The first indication of this theory is seen in presentation of harvested land. Brinley’s acreage was a crucial asset and consequently, it supplied him with fiscal security. His private ownership of the landscape presents the capitalist theme that individual assets are a driving force behind economic prosperity. The importance of this idea is well documented in the portrait and the depiction of land highlights the subject's initial incorporations into the history of American painting.

The symbolic relationship between property and portraiture is further explained in the 1789 portrait, *Esther Boardman*, by Ralph Earl (1751-1801) (Figure 1.2) In this painting, the same adherence towards the illustration of landscape is prevalent. The traditions remain constant and the background is suggestive of the property of the sitter. Again, assertions regarding the status of Mrs. Boardman are apparent and land ownership presents the ultimate marker of individual fortune. Although the United States of America separated politically from Britain, the ingrained connection to the land as a marker of success remains a presiding characteristic within portraiture. While the tradition of portraiture remained reliant upon European aesthetic customs, the connection to the landscape was uniquely American. Esther Boardman’s brother was a prosperous merchant from New Milford, Connecticut, the setting depicted in the portrait’s background. The family gained affluence through free trade and the aggressive acquisition of land.28 This exhibition of place through the landscape behind Esther Boardman is connotative of personal pride in the ability to work and obtain. Boardman is seen in fine accoutrements, having reaped the benefits of her family’s success and uniting her wealth with the physical landscape of America. Her family’s achievement allowed for the extravagances illustrated and relate to Adam Smith’s discussion of the value one’s labors as the foundation for all other forms of property.29 Through her family’s ability to use the northeastern land for their economic benefit, capitalist themes are resoundingly accentuated.

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28 Carrie Rebora Barratt, "Faces of a New Nation: American Portraits of the 18th and Early 19th Centuries," 33.
29 Adam Smith and Edwin Cannan, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York, NY: Bantam Dell, 2003), 168. This directly correlates to the discussion brought forth in the section titled The Origins of Capitalism in America. The same quote from the previous section relates directly to this portrait.
As landscape art came into fashion toward the end of the eighteenth-century, American painting fully expressed capitalist philosophies upon canvases, exposing the indisputable socioeconomic significance placed upon the physicality of the country. This shift in subject matter changed the art from principally relating with the person depicted to the representations primarily signifying the prominence of the American landscape. In this switch of roles, the importance of the land was visually amplified. This is successfully documented in Thomas Cole’s (1801-1848) painting, View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow, 1836. (See figure 1.3) Attorney Alfred L. Brophy analyzed this Hudson River School painting and its affiliation with property in his 2008 essay, Property and Progress: Antebellum Landscape Art and Property Law.\(^{30}\) For Brophy, this painting is indicative of property lines, exposing a division between nature and man. He further asserts the painting displays property distinctions between men and he refers to the delineations between tracks of land on the pastoral, right side of the canvas.\(^{31}\) Brophy makes note of the influential role that individual property had upon the psyche of Antebellum America however, he excludes the argument that these paintings are also indicators of the existence of capitalism. He is keen to bring in a poignant quote from Thomas Cole’s 1835 Essay on American Scenery, which discusses man and property. Cole stated,

\[\text{The cultivated must not be forgotten is still more important [than the natural] to man in his social capacity—necessarily bringing him in}\]


contract with the cultured; it encompasses our homes, and, though devoid of the stern sublimity of the wild, its quieter spirit steals tenderly into our bosoms mingled with a thousand domestic affections and heart-touching associations—human hands have wrought, and human deeds hallowed all around.\textsuperscript{32}

Brophy uses the artist’s rhetoric as a marker for the important role of property in the cultivation of society. He asserts property lines helped move American civilization forward and explains that this quote by Cole substantiates these claims.\textsuperscript{33} These allegations are accurate in their assessment of property as a distinguishing characteristic for American society. What Brophy omits, is that each of these ideas regarding property speak to the all-encompassing theme affirming the existence of American capitalism throughout the nineteenth-century. Cole’s opinions address the individual and the work implied within property ownership. Brophy speaks to these labors as the fundamentals for the progression of society and in this respect, property cannot stand on its own as a theme. Rather, it works within the constructs of capitalism as a mode for nineteenth-century Americans to develop their own personal finance. As Cole communicates the importance of cultivation as a concept more significant to man than the wild, it becomes clear that industrialization and the pastoral were necessary components of American life. These aspects existed in the United States through a lens which simultaneously rationalizes landscape through capitalism as property. Subsequently, land ownership became a measure for man to support life. From property, as emphasized in \textit{The Oxbow}, man exists and makes individual claims upon the landscape, exposing the central relationship between Americans and their artistic history with capitalism.


\textsuperscript{33} Alfred L. Brophy, "Property and Progress: Antebellum Landscape Art and Property Law," 616.
Thomas Cole brings forth the discussion of the Hudson River School, as he is considered the “father” of the artistic movement. He begins the discussion substantiating nineteenth-century landscape painting as the exemplification of these theories. From portraiture to the beginnings of landscape painting, capitalism is exposed as a foundational socioeconomic and political philosophy which had influential underpinnings in the birth of American art. As the Hudson River School progressed as an artistic movement, this concept gradually manifested in the thematic bedrock of renderings of the American landscape. The duality of property and capitalism within landscape painting brings forth the discussion of a noteworthy Hudson River School figure and allows for attention to be placed upon the central artist for this argument, Worthington Whittredge.

*Individual Property and the Career of Worthington Whittredge*

The elaboration of capitalist property within American landscape painting is highlighted throughout the career of Worthington Whittredge (1820-1910). As a follower of the Hudson River School, his career provides the perfect example for the analysis of these appreciable nineteenth-century philosophies. His comprehensive oeuvre presents the quintessential American landscape catalogue. From subject matter to location, Whittredge provided a predictable body of work for a Hudson River School artist. For this discussion, the commonality of Whittredge is an exceedingly positive characteristic, as it espouses his symptomatic relationship with the artistic movement. In these attributes, his career and the Hudson River School movement embody the universal for a dichotomy created by the socioeconomic and political sphere of nineteenth-century America.
The principal themes of capitalism are best applied to Whittredge’s paintings of New England farms and pastoral landscapes. They continue the discussion of capitalism and the American landscape from Thomas Cole’s View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow, 1836, discussed in the previous section, into Whittredge’s career and express a similar economic narrative. The relationship between the farmer and American capitalism displays the influential role the philosophy had upon the nineteenth-century. Scholar of American capitalism, Charles Post, details a timeline for the economic theory through an analysis which maintains structure by ascribing the concept of Historical Materialism. His theories pertain to the concept of the northeastern farm and are articulated in his book, The American Road to Capitalism: Studies in Class-structure, Economic Development, and Political Conflict, 1620-1877. When discussing the agrarian origins of capitalism Post stated,

A consistent theme in these varied discussions is the central importance of the transformation of countryside in the process of industrialisation. Whether conceived as the result of the expansion of the market, the development of new social-property relations or the emergence of new values and norms, there is a consensus that an agrarian revolution is a necessary precondition of an industrial revolution.

Post pronounced the development of the countryside was a key marker for the growth of capitalism in the United States. As industrialization of the national landscape progressed, the American market changed and exponentially matured. The relationships between land, country, and man personified differing roles, as each construct supplied its own

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34 “Historical Materialism Definition,” Merriam-Webster, accessed July 29, 2016, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/historical%20materialism. Merriam-Webster defines Historical Materialism as “the Marxist theory of history and society that holds that ideas and social institutions develop only as the superstructure of a material economic base.”

connection to property. Post’s comments support that these individual farms were precursors to the explosion of capitalism seen during the Industrial Revolution. His supposition is incontrovertible throughout American art, and his argument is fostered through the subject matter of specific paintings by Whittredge.

American capitalism’s tie to agrarian lifestyles is thematically identifiable in Whittredge’s painting, *Landscape with Hay Wain*, 1861 (Figure 1.4). Painted the first year of the American Civil War, Whittredge exposed these sociopolitical attributes by including perspicuous focal points. The insertion of the American flag upon this individual farm presents a complex visual exchange between an acknowledgement regarding the serious predicament of the nation versus the importance of singular agrarian life for economic survival. Capitalism is first manifested through Whittredge’s depiction of the small farm. His awareness about the fiscal consequence of the landscape is best seen in the personal reminiscence of his birthplace, Ohio. His sentiments were expressed in his autobiography,

> In the region where we lived, which was one of the richest in the state and the land most coveted by farmers, there were great expanses of prairie and woodland extending for miles around… My father owned a grazing farm, the income of which was entirely derived from a small herd of cattle, a few sheep and a few horses. All the hay and cereals we raised were required to feed these animals.36

Whittredge asserted his unique awareness about the management of farms and their use as economic drivers for the sustainability of each American’s life. The theme is decidedly personal, as Whittredge conveys his familiarity with the subject matter’s productive value. The American farm impacted his upbringing, thereby connecting his existence with the success of this agrarian life. *Landscape with Hay Wain*, 1861, progressively

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becomes about the economic survival of a mid-nineteenth-century American through the attention to this individual farm. While ever at odds with the influx of industrialization, the small farm presents the heart of American capitalism at the precipice of monumental change brought forth by the nation’s internal conflict. Based on his sentiments and personal connection, Whittredge knew of the farm’s gravity for individuals. His statements and painting are indicators of this understanding.

As Landscape with Hay Wain, 1861, presents a picturesque farm near Dobb’s Ferry, New York, the viewer is also privy to the influence of the agricultural system in the Northeast. Its position in the painting allows for the implied importance of property to develop thematically within the canvas. The scene shows the use of property as a method of economic sustainability for the individual farmer, thus expressing a central component of capitalism. The juxtaposition between the farmer and the landscape creates a dialogue where the viewer cannot ignore fundamentals of American economics. In regards to the painting, Whittredge scholar Anthony F. Janson states in his book, Worthington Whittredge, “The flag helps to identify the scene specifically as the United States. It also serves to elevate the farmers to emblems of the American pastoral ideal who live with beneficent nature in a state of harmony, symbolized by the mellow sunset.” This statement supports that Whittredge’s landscape can only be the United States. The flag specializes the narrative to America and validates the country’s unique associations with landscape. It provides an inherent contrast between the American economy against the rest of the world. Janson makes clear that by the inclusion of the

farmer, the profession was elevated to a higher intellectual level and was expressive of an idea supporting the balance of economy and the natural world. The coexistence is stressed in *Landscape with Hay Wain*, 1861, as Whittredge encouraged the capitalistic ventures of the individual farmer and his selective importance within the landscape of America. The farmer’s use of property adduces these sentiments, as the subject features the importance of personal industry in the United States during the nineteenth-century.

These positions are correspondingly conveyed through Whittredge’s *The Clam Diggers*, 1866 (Figure 1.5). With Luminist compositional traits, the painting exhibits American capitalism through a slightly contrasting aesthetic lens.\(^{39}\) Regarding subject matter, Whittredge’s seascape painting unveils the commercialism affecting Americans. Again, in the singular representation of a family working amongst nature, there is an amplified meaning assigned to this relationship. While the nature of property is defined by what is obtained from the sea, the rhetoric of the labor is categorically capitalist.

Thinking about clam diggers as a profession emphasizes this narrative. While chronologically later than the painting, the 1908 article, “Natural Instruments of Social Service: From Primitive Production to Civilized,” from the journal, *The Public: A National Journal of Fundamental Democracy & A Weekly Narrative of History in the Making*, detailed the relationship between the clam digger and capitalism. It stated,

> While land-capitalism is deadly to labor interests, whether alone or as an element in capital-capitalism, the latter is quite innocuous without the former. Returning for further exemplification of this to our clam digger, with sticks and stones for his capital, we can see that he is independent as long as he has access to the natural sources of supply of sticks and stones and clams. But what is true of the clam digger in those primitive circumstances is true of industry as a whole in the most advanced stages of the industrial arts and the most complex conditions of

\(^{39}\) Janson, *Worthington Whittredge*, 98. Janson explains that the use of Luminist traits was non-common for Whittredge’s career despite its popularity amongst others within the Hudson River School.
commercialism…And thereafter, in digging and opening clams, doesn’t he use artificial instruments as well as natural instruments in securing artificial products—“capital” as well as “land”—in securing “wealth?”

Through this text, the connection becomes axiological. The profession’s tie to the physical landscape promotes privatized economic themes. The statement connects to the subject matter of Whittredge’s painting. The clam digger uses the landscape to sustain his own life and secure his own personal property. The relationship between the man and the sea is reliant on these concepts. The sea is a primitive source of industry for the clam diggers, and it allows for this individual group to combine their industrious attitudes toward work with their ability to obtain capital, land, and wealth. The timing of these sentiments speaks to the persistence of this uniquely American economic narrative. While the rhetoric dates approximately fifty years later, it highlights the importance of capitalism throughout the history of the country and the provocations successfully sponsor the natural connection in Whittredge’s scene. Whittredge placed significance upon this act, thereby engaging the viewer with an economic subject that had continued weight within the framework of the United States. This painting indicates that while Whittredge may have stylistically changed through the use of Luminist characteristics, the thematic motifs in The Clam Diggers, 1866, remain consistent with the capitalist influences prevalent during the nineteenth-century.

The painting further reveals the fragility of this relationship and the changes inherent within post-Civil War America. Nature was no longer viewed as an

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overwhelming threat to man. The influx of industrialization placed the American
landscape amidst dramatic changes in its relationship with its inhabitants, *The Clam
Diggers*, 1866, also interprets this symbiotic connection. While man is dependent on the
sea, there is a decidedly environmental concern associated with this scene. Although the
preceding analyses of the Hudson River School connect man and the natural world with a
spiritual influence, this painting discloses the divisive capitalistic impacts inherent within
the American experience. Through the existence of clam diggers, the economic
dependence between man and the American landscape is revealed. Without the sea, the
clam digger ceases to survive and consequently, the painting advertises the dependence
of man upon nature. Nature does not profit from interactions with the individual. It is the
individual which benefits from this exchange, promoting the advancement of these
people through their ability to prosper off the landscape. Whittredge’s scene subtly
displays these themes. This idea is articulated by Whittredge scholar, Anthony Janson, in
his 1978 article, *Worthington Whittredge: The Development of a Hudson River Painter,
1860-1868*. He stated,

> The basic message of Whittredge's paintings is that man can no longer
abandon himself to nature; instead, it is nature which will inevitably be
lost to man. They reflect the altered perception of America in the wake of
the Civil War and partake of the widely shared pessimism that undermined
the very foundations of the Hudson River School.  

The timing of *Clam Diggers*, 1866, expresses Janson’s sentiments and supports that
Americans had a changed perception of their landscape after the Civil War. While the
Hudson River School is inclined to project Idealism, post-Civil War overtones show a

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different scene. Janson referenced the growth of the American economy at the expense of the landscape and articulated that while this relationship was necessary for Americans to obtain property and sustain their lives amongst the social structure, there was a heightened realization that these scenes were fleeting.

Whittredge recognized this change but credited it as an indicator for the necessity of Hudson River School painters. He stated, “Great railroads were opened through the most magnificent scenery the world ever saw, and the brush of the landscape painter was needed immediately.” While Whittredge implied that the growth of industry provided the ability to paint more landscapes, the sentiments also suggest a change within the way nineteenth-century Americans related to their country. Much like the clam diggers reliance on the provisions of the sea, the infrastructure of the American economy was dependent upon its natural property. From 1864 on, the American landscape painters job changed in terms of the way they connected with their subject matter, as the ease of the capitalist society changed the visual personality of the country.

Reviving the themes exposed in Landscape with Hay Wain, 1861, Whittredge’s A Home by the Seaside, 1872, portrays a similar capitalist relationship between man and landscape (Figure 1.6). Through Whittredge’s re-depiction of a harvest scene, parallel themes are apparent despite the later date of completion. The painting fosters the significance of the agrarian lifestyle as an essential proponent for the American economy. Again, the viewer is exposed to the individual farm. This inclusion highlights the importance of personal property as a driver of individual labor and calls attention to its role within the framework of the American socioeconomic system. By including the farm

at the time of harvest, Whittredge promoted that while the location of these scenes may fluctuate throughout the northeast, the profession does not. These themes are well documented in *A Home by the Seaside*, 1872, as the setting changes to Newport, Rhode Island.\(^{44}\) Whittredge’s commitment to representing these northeastern scenes displays a keen sense of awareness regarding the gravity of the subject matter. In this specific painting, the background shows people laboring in the farmland, harvesting and obtaining wealth from the natural resources of the landscape. Here, the narrative is capitalist as it champions the value individual labors.

Whittredge knew of the importance of labor within the constructs of the American farm. From personal experience, he was cognizant of the imperative relationship between the farms he presented and the toils of work. The subject matter in *A Home by the Seaside*, 1872, displays this awareness. Whittredge stated, “Labor on the farm was so imperative, and there was so little help to be obtained that farmers’ boys could not be spared to go to school.”\(^{45}\) Labor as a tool with more worth than education shows the value of agrarian capitalism during the nineteenth-century. Furthermore, connecting Whittredge’s sentiments to this painting shifts the narrative. The labor of the people depicted had immeasurable value, sustaining their lives and providing in a way which was not possible through education. The worth of individual property is also promoted through Whittredge’s comments. His own life was impacted by the role of property and the fundamental part it played in the survival of the nineteenth-century American.

Professor of economics Sue Headlee stated in her book, *The Political Economy of the Family Farm: The Agrarian Roots of American Capitalism*, “the period of 1850 to

\(^{44}\) Janson, *Worthington Whittredge*, 140.
1870 saw an acceleration of the purchase of farm capital equipment on the mechanization of agriculture.” She continued, “When the price of wheat rose in the 1850s, family farmers purchased capital equipment to spread that family labor over the land they owned. Their motive was to earn cash to finance the ownership of that land.” Her assessment explains the narrative presented by Whittredge’s painting and upholds the role of property within the goals of the average American farmer. The scene in A Home by the Seaside, 1872, expresses this ideology in its subject matter. The connection between the painting and Headlee’s argument displays that the goals of the individual farmer were to accumulate land. Through Whittredge’s rendering, individual ownership of the American landscape becomes increasingly indicative of the country’s thematic connection with capitalism. Furthermore, as 1850-70 was a period of popularity for the Hudson River School, the painting speaks to the demands of the American market and its concerns, thereby unearthing another facet of the economic structure created by capitalism.

The self’s production of art played into this narrative and based on this contextual evidence, Whittredge proves to be a prime example of this idea. There is an analogy delivered through this painting between Whittredge’s individuality as an artist and the influences of society. An 1870 article from Putnam’s Magazine, Original Papers on Literature, Science, Art, and National Interests spoke to the environment of art during the mid-nineteenth-century.

There are three distinct currents of art in New York… Second, the persona, the natural—an art which springs from the painter’s individual

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and exclusive impressions of nature, from which we get the only original and creative art—...the art of Sanford R. Gifford, W.T. Richards, Frederick Church, John F. Kensett, Jervis McEntee, C.C. Griswold, Hubbard, Cropsey, Whittredge, and Winslow Homer. The article promoted the individual characteristics of Whittredge and the important role his personal preferences played within his process. Based on the agrarian nature of the post-Civil War United States, the impressions and stylistic components advocated by Whittredge were unique to his talents. His subject matter derived from societal influences which pervaded his career. This response disseminates Whittredge as an interpreter of the economic narrative at the forefront of the discussion during a period of great change in America. It displays his prominence within the movement and shows his standing amongst the nations artistic community. Whittredge was president of the National Academy of Design from 1874-77, further supporting his relevance within the Hudson River School and contextualizing this specific painting within the movement. While the artists represent a popular moment in American art, they are additionally a group which expressed the conferred interests of society and Whittredge’s A Home by the Seaside, 1872, exists as no exception.

As the Hudson River School movement fell out of fashion during the late nineteenth-century, Whittredge did not shift from the stylistic influences or the traditional subjects of Hudson River School painting. Old Homestead by the Sea, 1883, exhibits Whittredge’s adherence to portraying the farm as a subject in his paintings (Figure 1.7).

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This persistence in depicting the farm maintains its standing throughout the nineteenth-century as a marker of American productivity and personal industry. Again, Whittredge’s scene displays people laboring within the landscape of the United States. While Janson attenuates for stylistic changes as a rationale for the looser brush strokes, the narrative remains wholly capitalist.\(^{50}\) The industrialized propensities of American society changed the farming tools shown, exhibiting the growth and progress of the United States as an economic power.

Whittredge’s nostalgia for the loss of picturesque scenes was documented when he discussed the meaning behind the genre scenes of Eastman Johnson (1824-1906).\(^{51}\) He wrote, “if the woods of Maine lumbermen and sugar camps are still to be found, the same primitive wilderness scarcely exists and the spirit of the scene has become greatly changed.”\(^{52}\) His reminiscences reflect his inclination to support individual farm scenes within his own paintings and his perceptions are further illustrated in his *Old Homestead by the Sea*, 1883. Much like Johnson’s genre paintings, Whittredge’s simple agrarian scenes were consistently changed by the industrialization of America, a side effect of capitalism. The average value of all farm property in the United States considerably increased during the 1880’s and the family farm, as expressed in Whittredge’s painting, experienced new challenges.\(^{53}\) As labor and property were exponentially commodified by the growing American wheat market, the relationship between man and the land increased in its

\(^{50}\) Janson, *Worthington Whittredge*, 180.
capitalist values. The nostalgia associated with Whittredge’s scene shows the individualistic past as an important marker for the landscape of the country and that it had a continual influence upon the American market. The commodification of the American landscape presents these capitalistic ventures, as it removes poetry and pronounces the role of progress upon the scene. The family portrayed is at odds with this internal economic struggle and their own labors are imperative for the continued existence of this rural New England scene. The personal industry required in competing with the market was contingent upon farm property. Whittredge’s continued depiction of this scene serves as a manifestation of the late nineteenth-century’s dependence upon this bond. The divisions of farmland are seen in Whittredge’s inclusion of the stone wall. This inclusion relates to Thomas Cole’s *The Oxbow*, 1832, as it shows the continued progress of the American landscape toward the pastoral and the division amongst people by establishing personal properties.

Whittredge was personally affected by the complexities of farm life in the north. He stated, “My father was a poor man. He owned unencumbered the farm of 120 acres on which we lived, but in spite of the hard labor he poured into it, it yielded little more than a subsistence for the family.” The capitalist endeavors of the farm system presented challenges for Whittredge’s own life. In this vein, the subject matter of *Old Homestead by the Sea*, 1883, depicts an understanding of the hardships faced by these individual farmers. Hard labor upon your property was not necessarily a determinant of fiscal success. However, Whittredge’s comments do support it provided a means of survival. While his father’s farm was not lucrative in expanding their financial condition, it was

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successful in supporting their lives. This concept aligns with the rhetoric of Adam Smith and furthermore, Whittredge’s upbringing connects with his painting’s subject matter. The property of the laborers on the American landscape allows for varying degrees of monetary achievement and while there are hardships imbued within this agrarian structure, there is a response articulated sponsoring that American life could not exist without the industry of the individuals represented.

Whittredge continued to portray these economic narratives within his paintings until the end of his career. His work, *Harvest Time: Summer in Farmington Valley*, 1900, further demonstrates the relationship between the individual farmer and property as proponents of a capitalist society (Figure 1.8). Whittredge’s attention to the harvest shows the American farm at the height of its production time and as a quantifiable entity, exposing its worth through measures of production. The timing of this painting represents a wistful piece for Whittredge’s oeuvre. This juncture of American history saw increased industrial capital and the declining necessity of the family farm.\textsuperscript{56} Headlee asserted, “without the family farm system, the mass production of … machinery probably would not have been taken on by American entrepreneurial capitalists,” supporting that these farmers were essential to the economic infrastructure of the nation.\textsuperscript{57} Whittredge’s subject matter becomes progressively critical, as the harvest represents the agrarian organization of the country and its means for competitive success.


\textsuperscript{57} Headlee, *The Political Economy of the Family Farm: The Agrarian Roots of American Capitalism*, 5.
**Whittredge and his Contemporaries: Art and Capitalism throughout the Nineteenth-Century**

The rhetoric divulged between members of the Hudson River School exposes the overarching influence of capitalism upon these artists. Worthington Whittredge associated with many of his contemporaries, further promoting this economic narrative. Largely, this is due to the individualistic nature of the American landscape painter. Prominent nineteenth-century landscape artist, Asher B. Durand (1796-1886), stated in his 1855 *Letters on Landscape Painting*, “Why should not the American landscape painter, in accordance with the principle of self-government, boldly originate a high and independent style, based on his native resources.” These opinions correspond with the impact of capitalism on the state of the nineteenth-century artist. The concept of self-government as a principle that should be intertwined within painting exposes a uniquely American proponent of landscape painting. The response reveals the relationship between a personal governing of the self against nature. Symbolically, this concept contends that the intertwinement of the two cannot be ignored. As capitalism is profoundly concerned with the value of private labors, Durand’s musings show the private industry of the landscape painter. For the Hudson River School artist, the landscape is their artistic property. The idea that it is “theirs” further articulates the imposing philosophy of capitalism within their mindsets. Through themselves and their perceived ownership of the scenes they painted, there is a private artistic ownership of the American landscape highlighted.

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The multivalent nature of Durand’s words connects to Adam Smith’s ideas regarding private property. Smith states, “As soon as the land of any country has all become private property, the landlords, like all other men, love to reap where they never sowed, and demand a rent even for its natural produce.” If we are to think of landscape painting as the natural produce and the physical landscape as the private property of the Hudson River School painter, then there is a dramatically capitalist exchange offered. They become industrialists amongst the artistic community. Their self-governing character perpetuates a consideration for individual acquisitions and while they have not necessarily worked the land which provides their successes, they have aesthetically benefited from all that the landscape offers.

This connects to Smith’s idea of the invisible hand, a virtual synonym with the term capitalism. Smith states,

As every individual, therefore, endeavours as much as he can both to employ his capital in the support of domestic industry, and so to direct that industry that its produce may be of the greatest value, every individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was not part of it. By pursuing his own interest, he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.

The theme of this passage expresses the labors of the individual also bolster society. By focusing on the singular, and the principles of governing one’s self, society is

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correspondingly sponsored. Much like the nineteenth-century American landscape painter who focuses on himself and his relationship with nature, the impacts of this consideration upon the movement are positive. The industry of the American landscape merged with the artistic championing of the natural labors of individuals and created an elaborate structure which solidified the socioeconomic system’s impact upon American art. As seen with the New England landscapes of Whittredge, the focus upon the agrarian farm successfully promoted the ingrained importance of individual’s labors amongst these settings. The subject matter was also a favorite for others within the movement, expressing the relationship between not just Whittredge, but the whole of the Hudson River School.

In 1836, prominent American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) stated in his essay, Nature, that Americans consistently search for “an original relation to the universe.”⁶¹ The inherent individualism within Emerson’s rhetoric could be deemed as wholly Romantic, or it can be converged with the economics of capitalism. Artistic relations were not solely for those with the paintbrush, the writings of influential figures like Emerson shaped the nineteenth-century American and as such, attention must be given to these prevailing cultural themes. His sentiments correspond with Whittredge’s own positions. The artist expressed, “We all have different eyes and different souls, and each is affected or should be, through these mediums.”⁶² The correlation of thought between the two succeeds in an exploration of the unique structure of the individual. The individual creates their own relation to the universe and in this context, the landscape.

What is distinctive, is that the American relation with landscape is perpetually infused with the economics of the country. The singular ability to sustain their lives creates this exchange and as we see the Hudson River School artists communicate the individual through both their own perceptions and the value of agrarian subject matters, attention is given to its immense worth within society. Through a personal relationship with the land, the exchange with culture is improved, thus promoting the merit of Smith’s “invisible hand.” Nature provided the discipline for the hard-working man and existed as both poetry and property.\(^63\) The reflection of these contrasts within the Hudson River School is visible, as the poetic representations are forced to live amongst this capitalist narrative.

An 1848 book by James Batchelder titled, *The United States as a Missionary Field*, stated in reference to the American landscape,

> Its sublime mountain ranges—its capacious valleys—its majestic rivers—its inland seas—its productiveness of soil, immense mineral resources, and salubrity of climate, render it a most desirable habitation for man, and all are worthy of the sublime destiny which awaits it, as the foster mother of future billions, who will be the governing race of man.\(^64\)

This passage supports the ideological framework existent in the United States. The perception that the natural resources of America were meant to be used to produce perpetuates that man’s labors upon the landscape were of supreme importance. These sentiments corresponded to those of Whittredge. He wrote, “There is no denying the fact that the early landscape painters of America were too strongly affected by the prevailing idea that we had the greatest country in the world for scenery.” His rhetoric corroborates the ingrained structure of this capitalistic mentality with not solely industrialists, but also

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\(^64\) James L. Batchelder, *The United States, the West, and the State of Ohio as Missionary Fields* (Cincinnati: David Anderson, 1848), 8.
with the country’s artists. Between these two passages, there is an implied ownership of the landscape articulated throughout the culture of the country. Also, the suggestion that this property of the United States provides growth and the ability for man to sustain life further projects these capitalist notions of development.

As the landscape painters ventured west with the rest of the population, the capitalist themes remained constant, harkening back to the Puritanical origins of America. In 1629, colonial settler John Winthrop referenced *The Bible* and quoted, “into… the wilderness’, by recalling God’s instruction to man: ‘Increase & multiply, replenish the earth and subdue it.” Landscape scholar Tim Barringer states in his book *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820-1880*, this colonial context connects with the divisive American mindset of expansion. He asserts Winthrop’s statements correspond with “the nineteenth-century pursuit of personal and corporate profit and with national economic development.” The rhetoric of the New England Puritans is bolstered by Winthrop’s statements and Barringer’s analysis. They expose how capitalism was transferred from century to century in America and furthermore, how capitalism maintained a lasting effect upon the country’s artistic movements. This component of the conversation supports the affiliations between the nineteenth-century dialogues of Batchelder and Whittredge.

Private industry fueling this westward expansion speaks to the heart of capitalism in America and substantiates the importance of the Hudson River School painters.

Worthington Whittredge enjoyed a close friendship with his contemporary Albert

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Bierstadt (1830-1902) and the two travelled extensively together in Europe as students of the Dusseldorf school.\textsuperscript{68} Bierstadt’s paintings of Yosemite were so popular that there was a great fear the landscapes he rendered would collapse into private property ownership during the Civil War. Landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead (1822-1903) proposed a bill to preserve Yosemite in 1864,

> It was during one of the darkest hours when the paintings of Bierstadt… had given to the people on the Atlantic some idea of the sublimity of Yosemite… that consideration was first given to the danger that such scenes might become private property and through false taste, the caprice or refinements of some industrial speculations of their holders, their value to posterity be injured.\textsuperscript{69}

Within Olmstead’s statement and the popularity created by Bierstadt’s scenes, there was a fear that capitalism could go too far with industrialization. The distress expounded by Olmstead projects that the nation was consumed with the idea of private property ownership. The fact that physical landscapes were as beautiful and as resoundingly sublime as those projected through the idealisms of Bierstadt’s paintings displays a nineteenth-century romanticism which polarizes the American economy against the landscape. The nostalgia existent within his argument conveys that private property ownership had a demonstrative side which could metaphorically cripple the naturalistic American dream while simultaneously heralding economic aspirations.

Whittredge expressed the need for Bierstadt’s grand landscapes when he wrote, “Simplicity of subject was not in demand. It must be some great display on a big canvas to suit the taste of the times… Bierstadt and Church answered the need.”\textsuperscript{70} These

\textsuperscript{68} Janson, \textit{Worthington Whittredge}, 50.
consequential paintings produced by Bierstadt and Whittredge’s contemporaries spoke to the demands of the Atlantic American. The subject matter of the West exposed an idealism that was threatened by capitalism and its unforgiving industrialized wake. This complex rationalization of the landscape juxtaposes the necessity of private ownership for the individual against the imperative quality of nationalistic scenes for society. For Americans, their version of monuments took the form of magnificent landscapes such as the Yosemite Valley. This demand for nationalism displayed the commodification of the physical landscape as secondary to the imbued necessity for nature. President Abraham Lincoln (1806-1865) signed this bill into law, thereby disconnecting any impacts of industrialization upon the revered scene. This action removed the importance of capitalism and private property ownership on a national scale. Ideologically, this act was a shift away from the traditional modes of relating to the land through capitalistic endeavors and exposed a movement toward collective ownership of the landscape, saturated with purpose for the nation. It contrasts Smith’s assertions that the benefit of the individual ultimately helped society because of the damage to the nation which would have occurred due to the development of the West. The Hudson River School was the catalyst for an intellectual change in perceiving the landscape of America.

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Chapter Two

Marxism and the Hudson River School: Contextualizing a National Property through Artistic Exemplifications of Dialectical Materialism

The Origins of Marxism in America

Within American society, Marxism exists as a part of an embedded transhistorical narrative. The ideas behind the socioeconomic philosophy are seen in cultural and artistic expressions which highlight the economic state of the country. While it is not historically defined within the constructs of the United States until the nineteenth-century, its ideological underpinnings pervaded American culture in the late eighteenth-century. Although an important facet of its history, socialism in the United States was not simply a byproduct of European immigration. The philosophy has roots in the beginnings of America and presents a similar chronology to capitalism.\(^{72}\) Shaker communities exhibit a foundational example for Marxist conceptions in the United States and further expose one of the first instances of communalism within the nation. This collectivism made property a part of what they referred to as the “consecrated whole.”\(^{73}\) Their beliefs resulted in the members of these religious communities giving their property and labor to society for the benefit of the group. The role of property as a construct which provides for the group is an essential component of Marxism and its origins in these Shaker communities exposes there was a sect of American society which rejected economic individualism. These Shaker communities existed in the northeast, upholding that the region was privy to a complex economic dichotomy at the start of America.


These Shaker beliefs correspond with the nineteenth-century philosophies of Karl Marx (1818-1883). In his *German Ideology*, Marx stated,

Further, the division of labour implies the contradiction between the interest of the separate individual or the individual family and the communal interest of all individuals who have intercourse with one another. And indeed, this communal interest does not exist merely in the imagination, as the “general interest,” but first of all in reality, as the mutual interdependence of the individuals among whom the labour is divided.74

Here, it is evident eighteenth-century Shaker principles align with the ideas of Marx. The notion that property exists for the communal benefit of the majority correlates with the Shakers and constructs a perpetual philosophical narrative in America. Through Marx’s rhetoric, the individual is lowered in value when compared to the communal interests of all people. The worth of the group is an essential component of Marxism and the introduction of this interdependent structure created the basis for the philosophy.75 This parallel proves that socialism had an ideological source earlier than the mid-nineteenth-century.76

For the United States, Marxism further developed when Germans immigrants relocated after the 1848 Revolutions in Europe. Many of these people became active in the German-American labor movement.77 Their rejection of the status quo put in place by capitalism expressed an underrepresented subset of American society. Bringing forth Marx’s philosophies in mid-nineteenth-century United States presented issues within the

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76 The nineteenth-century is often referred to as the beginning point for Marxism in the United States with the introduction of the German 48ers and the transmission of German political beliefs into the country.
vast economic infrastructure already in place. However, based upon the ideological foundations of communities like the Shakers and more importantly, the growing struggles of the American farmer, there was a gap for the movement to fill within the national culture. Newspaper editor, union organizer, and colleague of Karl Marx, Joseph Weydemeyer (1818-1866), stated in the New York Turn Zeitung on August 1, 1852, “The accumulation of capital is not harmful to society; the harm lies rather in the fact that capital serves the interest of the few.” The opinions correspond with Marxism and demonstrate the ideology was prevalent in nineteenth-century America. Weydemeyer challenged the excessive accumulation occurring during this period. He promoted this type of lifestyle harmed society and created class struggles for the average American.

While Weydemeyer’s rhetoric was that of a German immigrant, it does not take away from the validity of his sentiments and their merit within American society. This period saw increased immigration to the United States, and the problems articulated by Weydemeyer pronounce the cultural struggles embedded in the economic infrastructure. Property existed as a type of capital which, under the control of the few, was not benefiting everyone in society.

Weydemeyer’s statements correspond to ideologies pronounced by Marx in his Introduction to the Critique of Political Philosophy, 1845. Marx stated,

All production is appropriation of nature by the individual within and through a definite form of society. In that sense it is a tautology to say that property (appropriation) is a condition of production. But it becomes ridiculous when from that one jumps at once to a definite form of property, e.g., private property... History points rather to common property as the primitive form, which still plays an important part at a much later period as communal property. The question as to whether wealth grows

more rapidly under this or that form of property, is not even raised here as yet. But that there can be no such thing as production, nor, consequently, society, where property does not exist in any form, is a tautology.  

The complex role of property within society is highlighted and is applicable to Weydemeyer’s sentiments. The implied value of the communal as beneficent for the whole of society is pronounced. This concept is imperative for any analysis through a Marxist lens. For Marx, the relationship expounded by the individual’s production in society is tied to property in a repetitive and synonymous fashion. Property is intertwined with production and as such, its value is determined upon whether there is a successful relationship between the two forms of capital. Marx expressed society and production do not exist without property and this theory is so elemental, it is repetitive within the conversation. Therefore, private property does not matter insomuch as the primitive form of the construct is communal property.

The intrinsic struggle existed with the types of wealth generated by private versus common property. For Marx, the benefit of society relates to the latter.81 His argument corresponds with Weydemeyer, as both highlight the relationship with the communal. The association advertises the cross-Atlantic filtration of these ideas into nineteenth-century American society. Additionally, the role of property becomes an overwhelming characteristic within the economic structure. For Americans who were beginning to experience the tensions of the Civil War, this connection of dialogue was poignant, as it occurred at a time where the very structure of the landscape was upon the precipice of

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81 Marx and Engels, The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy, 5.
great transformation. This change existed both physically and theoretically, as fervent industrialization changed the visual and economic structure of the United States. It is within this materialist approach to American history where exchanges amidst the national economy reveal the problematic nature of private property ownership. The economy began to serve the needs of the singular rather than the communal whole, and for Marx and Weydemeyer, this uncovered a flaw within the infrastructure.

On October 31, 1845, The National Reform Association declared its principles in the United States for the basis of social progress. Weydemeyer was connected with the group while he lived in New York City. They stated,

We call ourselves Americans, and we no other interests than those of the American people, because America is the asylum of the oppressed people everywhere, and because the interest of the American people is the interest of the whole human race…We recognize in the National Reformers our fellow-laborers in the cause of progress, as pioneers of a better future, as the advocates of the cause of the oppressed children of industry and as the only true democracy of the land.  

The National Reformers desired to work towards the betterment of a specifically American society. Their doctrine displays Marxist influences upon America, proving the philosophy permeated the cultural rhetoric. They felt there were substantial problems with the democracy laid out in the country and because of their focus upon the communal, they felt progress in the United States needed to materialize through the interests of the whole.  

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propensities, the narrative is localized to the United States through their doctrine. There is a nationalism communicated which speaks to a domestic community of Americans. This fact substantiates that while the overarching economic theme in the United States suggestively embodied capitalism, Marxism seized a small philosophical hold within society. The philosophy affected groups of Americans and the way they associated with the industry of their country. In this, the goals of the National Reformers do not exist that much differently from the preceding example of Shaker communities. Both groups were searching for a solution that enhanced the lives of the communal whole. This foundation exposes its rhetorical value amongst American society. The landscape served as an ignitor for industrialization and an inspiration for changes within the national relationship to the economic narrative.

Weydemeyer continued to project these outlooks in New York City and in December 1851, defended Marxian historical materialism. He wrote, “Up to now only the party hostile to the working class judge the material economic basis of all social events in its true light. Hence the need for greater determination, since the final conclusions can only be drawn if one proceeds from correct premises.”84 The materialist approach to American history is an integral facet of a Marxist analysis. Weydemeyer promoted this methodology in the United States, thereby enhancing the value of his sentiments. The conflicts exchanged by the material conditions of Americans created the necessity for national ownership of all land. Americans were deeply impacted by this philosophy, and this concept is best comprehended through the social events which transpired because of westward expansion.

Americans travelled west for a series of reasons. Much of the rationale for this Manifest Destiny is attributable to a desire for economic success. The vigor with which Americans attempted to stake their claim upon the landscape was so intensive that little attention was given to whether individuals encompassed the right to their actions. The national belief that the land was theirs and the imposing magisterial gaze which Americans thrust upon the scenery existed within a materialist approach to their nation.\(^{85}\)

Scholar of American landscape painting, Albert Boime, refers to the relationship between westward expansion and the nineteenth-century American as the embodiment of a “Magisterial Gaze.” He suggests westward expansion promoted a fundamental component of the American dream and created an inseparable relationship between it and a national identity.\(^{86}\)

The creation of a national identity associated with landscape presents a Marxist component of this analysis.

The intersection of Marx’s influence, Weydemeyer’s theories, and the formation of the United States as a place of communal ownership, created a trifecta of materialism which impacted the nineteenth-century. In this action, Americans created a collective history, representative of the actions of the nation as opposed to those of one individual. Contemporary of Marx, Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), stated, “Nature is the proof of dialectics, and it must be said for modern science that it has furnished this proof with very rich materials increasing daily.”\(^{87}\)

The nature of the American West encourages these sentiments and suggests Marxist dialogue throughout national expansion.


material conditions of the movement presented the national culture with challenges imbued within their economic desires. The new western national property created these exchanges and offered this narrative for the country. Through the associations between the public, the nation, and its artistic culture, these themes are unmistakable.

Preliminary Evidence for Marxist Influences upon American Art

Marxist influences upon American art are reliant upon the aesthetic development of a national character. Preliminary evidence for the philosophy’s impact is best articulated through paintings which present both images of America and a shared ownership of the landscape. This nationalism promoted the artistic and economic perceptions of the United States. This consideration was expressed through the portraiture of the American Revolution and the beginnings of the Hudson River School. In these multivalent images, the role of property reigns supreme. However, through the lens of Marxism, the perception of the landscape as national property is changed in the artistic narrative. The infiltration of these concepts discloses the Marxist relationship between the base and the superstructure. The methods of production exist within the “base” and art exists within the “superstructure,” both circularly influencing the other in Marxist theory. Therefore, property exists within the base of society, affecting the art created in the superstructure. In this juxtaposition, the basis for a Marxist approach to analyzing American art is achieved.

While contemporary nationalism precludes us from these bold connections, there is a communal ownership expressed by artist, Charles Willson Peale’s (1741-1827) George Washington, ca. 1779-81, which highlights an underexposed thematic connection

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88 Raymond Williams, Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays (London: Verso, 2005), 32.
between the subject matter and Marxism (Figure 2.1). The setting behind the figure of Washington is most representative of this argument. Peale depicted the then general in front of the landscape of Trenton, New Jersey. The Battle of Trenton was pivotal for the American Revolution and its result gave the Continental Army a source of inspiration for their cause.\textsuperscript{89} The nationalist implications associated with a Revolutionary War battle occurring upon a specific landscape removes the connotations of private property ownership from the setting. When this occurs, the land exists as the property of the masses, tied to a cultural meaning for all Americans. If this endured as solely a portrait of George Washington, the narrative would be changed and the focus would be upon the individualism of the general and first president of the United States. The inclusion of the landscape of Trenton presents this area of New Jersey as a place rife with national and political connotations during the late eighteenth-century. This idea that the landscape supplied the American community with value correlates to a Marxist conception of property. Furthermore, the labors of the group, also known as the Continental Army, provided for the intrinsic worth of Peale’s scene. The conflict exchanged between the two armies also demonstrates dialectical approach to this painting.

This work relates to Marx’s considerations on what he refers to as the second form of property, or that which is obtained through conquest. Marx details this is communal property and it “proceeds especially from the union of several tribes into a city by agreement or conquest, and which is still accompanied by slavery.”\textsuperscript{90} While


\textsuperscript{90} Marx and Engels, \textit{The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy}, 39.
rudimentary, if we are to think of the American colonies as tribes joined together as a kind of city though agreement and conquest, we see the representations of Marxist theory regarding property within Peale’s painting. Furthermore, as slavery existed in the United States at the time this was painted, the argument is strengthened and the analogy between Marx and the American Revolution is prevalent. Washington exists as a subject which localizes this work to the narrative of America. The landscape behind him is far more telling of the thematic implications of property within eighteenth-century culture.

Through conflict, this communal property was obtained. Thus, the implications for the whole and the associations between the public and Trenton are pervasive. In this vein, the intertwining of early portraiture and the later Marxist rhetoric is unmistakable, as the thematic meaning of the background presents more than just a formidable image for Washington to stand in front.

As the United States expanded through the 1803 acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase, its relationship with the landscape changed. The visual framework of the country became representative of increased diversity and as such, the conceptualization of the landscape was saturated with defining national perceptions about nature. These acuities were persistent in their attempts to outline a national landscape and create a communal understanding of property. This argument is seen in the observations of Yale College geologist and travel writer, Benjamin Silliman (1779-1864). In 1819, while traveling with art patron and founder of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Daniel Wadsworth (1771-1848), he said, “National character often receives its peculiar cast from natural

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scenery… Nature significantly fashions cultures and their characteristic modes of expression.”

Through Silliman, the relationship between the whole and cultural modes of expression is linked to the landscape of the country. His rhetoric endorses a Marxist ideology upon nineteenth-century rationalizations of a national art. The benefit of the whole is dependent on the complex national character derived from the country’s relationship with the property it collectively possesses. The scenery provides the material which therein constructs society. As nature was the scenery of America during the nineteenth-century, it existed as a setting for the landscape painter to conceptualize for the shared artistic culture of the nation. As articulated by Engels, nature provides the proof for dialectics and at this period in the United States, westward landscapes delivered rich physical and ideological materials.

Frederic Edwin Church’s (1826-1900) *Niagara*, 1857, exists as a seminal example of the communal recognition of a national property (Figure 2.2). While there are certainly other works which engage this theme and precede Church’s painting, the expansive rendering of this scene exposes a foundational way of thinking about the landscape of the United States. Beautifully articulated, the painting simultaneously illustrates one of the best examples of the Hudson River School. The nationalism enunciated in the nineteenth-century dialogue surrounding this work features themes of shared property ownership.

The setting alone delivers a natural connection to the American economy. Niagara Falls became a national icon and implicitly a symbol of economic hegemony. This method of

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perception was the result of increased American exposure to the falls. The opening of the Erie Canal gave thousands of tourists the ability to visit the region, thus culturally appropriating *Niagara*, 1857, with the American existence.\(^9^4\) Niagara Falls projected American perceptions of their culture through the methods of the Hudson River School painter. Through its size and sublimity, the naturalistic sensation of the American landscape was personified for the country. This understanding was enunciated when American author, Adam Badeau (1831-1895), wrote in 1859, “American art will be turbulent and impassioned. Its artists emotional, brimful of earnestness, perhaps even stormy…like American nature, wild and ungovernable, mad at times.”\(^9^5\) His expressions display the nationalistic sense this specific scenery gave to the American people. The visual ownership of the landscape operated for all Americans, and the economic infrastructure of upstate New York provided the setting for the country to show its intensive productive prowess. The material conditions of the landscape impacted the cultural modifiers of the United States through landscape painting.

Badeau further expressed,

Is a true development of American mind; the result of democracy, of individuality, of the expansion of each… inspired not only by the irresistible cataract but by the mighty forest, by the thousand miles of river, by the broad continent we call our own, by the onward march of civilization, by the conquering of savage areas; characteristic alike of the western backwoodsman, of the Arctic explorer, the southern filibuster, the northern merchant. So, of course it gets expression in our art.\(^9^6\)

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The concept of an implied national ownership correlates to a Marxist perception of these cultural themes. Through conflict, these lands were obtained for the benefit of the American masses. The inherent materialism of Badeau’s rhetoric implores American society to communally benefit from their scenery. For Americans, this is intertwined with their economic infrastructure, thus encouraging the two cannot be separated within the discussion. As American landscape painters were tasked with the duty of representing these settings, the visual rhetoric also lessens the value of the individual amongst these scenes because the implied national ownership of places was of greater value to the nineteenth-century citizen. These themes are then projected within the national art of the United States, implicating aesthetics as visual stimulants for the collective intellectual possession of places such as Niagara Falls.

These conceptions were not just localized to the careers of Church or Badeau. They permeated the discussion regarding national art during the mid-nineteenth-century. This dialogue remains centered around the Hudson River School and the national ownership of the landscape promoted these themes. The conversation was conspicuous and even the value of the public was accounted for in an 1851 article in the Bulletin of the American Art-Union titled, “Development of Nationality in American Art.” It said,

The duty of the public towards Art is to be discriminating in their patronage, seeking out those indications of talent that point in the direction of true national feeling, and resisting all encroachments of an influence foreign to it, especially condemning all following or leaning to foreign schools; giving all facilities to home study, and discouraging artists from going abroad until they have settled themselves in their nationality—till Americanism is indelibly stamped on their intellects and hearts.  

The combined duty of the public implies the assessments of the American people were of extreme value for the nation’s artistic endeavors. As a group, they were meant to challenge and steer the direction of a national art form, representative of the whole. It is easy to align these sentiments with Marxism as they speak to a mass understanding of what defines Americans, the material relationship with landscape steering their convictions. Home study further supports the importance of American exceptionalism within the mindsets of the citizens. It promotes the creation of a national identity through artistic endeavors was imperative to the establishment of the American psyche, working communally for the development of the nation. The material landscape was the setting, subject matter, and inspiration for these understandings to take place. Deeply connected with the economy, landscape painting that expresses nationalism also projects a cultural and economic hegemony over the rest of the world which cannot be ignored. In this, the themes of Marxist theory permeate the discussion and while capitalism may remain in the hearts of sentimental Americans as the only method of production fit for the nation, it becomes clear that its impact upon the country exists within a complex dichotomy imbued with more socialist tendencies. Just as the setting of Niagara exposes these themes for Church, the landscape of the American West discloses these assessments. This argument is documented throughout the career of contemporary and friend of Frederic Edwin Church, Worthington Whittredge.

*Materialist Property and the Career of Worthington Whittredge*

Westward expansion and American Manifest Destiny brought Marxist theory within landscape painting to light. The perception of a national ownership combined with
a hegemonic, materialist approach to the Hudson River School stresses these acuities. These themes are pronounced through Whittredge’s paintings of the American West, a subject matter which proved dear to the artist throughout his life. Whittredge’s first venture west occurred in June 1865 and extended to October 1866. His voyage coincided with the surrender of General Lee and the end of the American Civil War, a momentous occurrence in American history which impermeably shaped the national identity.98 Whittredge stated, “At the close of the Civil War, I was invited by General Pope to accompany him on a tour of inspection throughout the department of the Missouri, as it was then called, which embraced all the eastern portions of the Rocky Mountains and New Mexico.”99 The timing of Whittredge’s trip places his connection with the West at an intense moment within the nation’s history. The ending of the Civil War signified the ending of cultural division within the country. The whole of the nation was raised in standing compared to the needs of the singular states, therein hinting at a Marxist approach to conceptualizing America.

Whittredge’s Encampment on the Platte River, 1865, conveys his symptomatic relationship with the American landscape because of the collective understanding of a national property (Figure 2.3). This painting articulates a series of artistic choices reflective of this consideration. Firstly, Whittredge was not as struck with the mountains of the West as he was with the great plains. He stated, “I had never seen the plains or anything like them. They impressed me deeply. I cared more for them than the mountains, and very few western pictures have been produced from sketches made in the mountains, but rather from those made on the plains with the mountains in the

distance.” His commitment to the subject matter is communicated through his musings. His recognition of the value of the plains as a measure of the American scenery which is just as important as the sublime mountains pronounces his cognizance of a national worth to every material aspect of the landscape. The plains were amongst the property of the country. In this, their value was implied for the inherent connection they had with the country’s economic prowess.

This journey and the paintings Whittredge produced are often referred to as the artist’s participation in a national adventure. The opening of the West consolidated his artistic vision of the United States into an image of appropriation with a commodified value for the country. The value of this landscape had grand associations for many Americans. This concept coincides directly with the ideas of Karl Marx. He wrote,

The social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people’s imagination, but as they really are; i.e. as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will.

Whittredge and Encampment on the Platte River, 1865, exists as the individual creating a social structure through landscape painting. The painting endures as an example of Whittredge’s own material production and the conditions of the landscape operated independently from his own artistic desires. Rather, the work is representative of the artist’s idealisms as they are. Whittredge’s love for the plains conveys the then contemporary social structure of the United States, ever obsessed with movement west. It

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101 Janson, Worthington Whittredge, 112.
102 Marx and Engels, The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy, 41.
further proclaims the determination of the State through every venture in that direction. The production of the painting operates as an understanding of the West through the artist’s material conditions and as such, is affected by Whittredge’s rendering. His fondness for the subject matter is fueled by the enthusiasm with which people explored the region and the painting’s implicit connotations of a national, implied ownership of the scene presents Marxist themes within the nineteenth-century.

When correlated with Marx, the positions illustrated by Whittredge are about the artist’s relation to nature. Nature as the case study for the artist to release his conscious expression of real relations interprets these Marxist conceptions within *Encampment on the Platte River, 1865*. The subject matter is of Native Americans amongst what Whittredge had deemed to be a poignant American landscape. He shared a distrust of the Native Americans and saw them as dangerous savages. Yet, this painting presents a series of choices which led Whittredge to include them amongst the plains. He referred to the plains as an entity within which “nothing could be more like an [American] landscape.” His relationship with nature expresses his hegemonic perception of the Native Americans and espouses the group as merely an addition to what was becoming the stereotypical national landscape. The Native Americans’ existence as superfluities upon the scenery rather than succinct individuals exposes the problematic conceptions of the nineteenth-century artist. The approach is wholly materialist as a group of people become the property of a visual culture as evidenced by this painting. This concept aligns with Marxist theory and presents an idealistic methodology to the nineteenth-century

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American’s understanding of what they perceived to be their landscape and correspondingly, their property.

In his 1855 *Grundrisse*, Marx expressed, "Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand."\(^{106}\) The interrelations between Whittredge and the Native Americans are presented within his landscape paintings. Each painting disclosed a sum of these interrelations and defined the setting for which these relations take place. Whittredge’s *Indian Encampment*, 1870-76, presents these societal interactions amongst the national landscape of America when focused upon the relationship between the artist and the Native Americans (Figure 2.4). Knowing Whittredge’s opinions regarding the group rationalizes these exchanges amongst nature and the landscape. Thematically, the painting endures as the summation of the artist’s experiences with this other cultural set. The painting is a product of Whittredge and American society’s perceptions upon what they viewed to be the quintessential western landscape.

For the nineteenth-century American, this way of thinking was not simply localized to Whittredge. In his 1855 *Star Papers: Experiences of Art and Nature*, the prominent figure, Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887) stated, “It is not any thing that I own…that rejoices me. It is nothing but the influence of those things in which every man has common possession—days, nights, forests, mountains, atmosphere, universal and unmonopolized nature!”\(^{107}\) These sentiments correspond with *Indian Encampment*, 1870-76, and Marxist rhetoric. Beecher articulated the greatest pleasures for a person were

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obtained through things all men can own. The betterment of society was achieved through this mutual interdependence. This ideology exposes a communal relation with the landscape and its role within the constructs of society. Furthermore, the knowledge that nature is what all men can take a joint ownership over validates this materialistic narrative, uncovering an intellectually hegemonic relationship. Unmonopolized nature, an embodiment of anti-capitalism, presented Americans with a place to find a shared joy. This property was viewed as communal and used for the equal benefit of the nation. As *Indian Encampment, 1870-76*, displays this theme through its inclusion of what Americans deemed the distinguishing modifiers of their landscape, the painting succeeds in illustrating the inferences of each subject. The dramatically rendered mountains indicate Whittredge understood popular subjects which Americans felt were implicitly theirs and that he was a part of projecting this cultural dominance. This painting was the result of Whittredge’s final of three ventures west, further supporting his nostalgic attachment to this scene.  

Francis Wayland stated in his *Elements of Political Economy*, “when property is held in common, every individual of the society to which it belongs, has an equal, but an undivided and indetermined, right to his portion of the revenue.” This rhetoric unites the subject presented by *Indian Encampment, 1870-76*, and ideas of Beecher. Together, these components create a combination of nineteenth-century perceptions which endorsed Marxist themes upon artistic endeavors. The common property of America, as articulated

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108 Janson, *Worthington Whittredge*, 126. Whittredge ventured west for the last time in 1871. The account is mentioned briefly in his autobiography and Janson explains there is a small amount of his work that exists from this trip.

by Whittredge’s canvas, exists for the benefit of society. Society therein encompassed a right to the revenue of the western landscape, as the acquisition of this area proved wholly beneficial.

Whittredge’s *Crossing the Platte River*, 1872-74, illustrates the artist’s best work while simultaneously depicting these socioeconomic themes (Figure 2.5). The contrast between *Indian Encampment*, 1870-76 and this painting embodies slightly different approaches to the same theme. While the subjects of these two paintings are essentially identical, the presentation is contrasting and the latter work indicates a more successful attempt at illustrating the scenery of the plains. In 1871, Whittredge wrote in a letter to the *Greely Tribune,*

> Those who have claimed so much for the atmosphere of Italy, never saw the atmosphere of our plains near the mountains, and it is pretty evident that they never dreamed of it, for they spent all their energies in glorifying what was around them, and declaring there was nothing in this world like it…We need age, historical associations, and great poets and painters to make our land as renowned as the ash heaps of the Old World; but we need nothing of this kind to enjoy its beautiful scenery when it is before our eyes, if we will but strip ourselves of old prejudices, and use our common senses.\(^{110}\)

Whittredge’s letter coincides with the timing of this painting, projecting Marxist attitudes upon the scene. This is accomplished through his description of the landscape. His purposeful articulation of the discrepancies between America and Europe, in terms of scenery, propagate this localized narrative and present the artist’s awareness of a national character and thus, a national property. He admits age and time were what was necessary for development and he submits the West was beautiful and appreciable through the common senses. These senses were tools which all people possessed and as such, they

were markers of the national character. The rhetoric promotes a materialist conception of history. The landscape as a place for historical associations to transpire supports this notion and indicates Whittredge as an interpreter of landscape through quantifiable entities.

Landscape painting was a thematic explanation of these appreciable exchanges, exposing its commonality as subject during the nineteenth-century. The 1851 article, “Development of Nationality in American Art,” correspondingly promoted Whittredge’s sentiments. It stated,

Art in the service of nationalism was envisioned as a record of the progress of humanity and the race. Thus, are marked indelibly the characteristics of the world, age by age; and we read on that mighty page, the progress of civilization—the movings of the spirit that animated the nations in the course of empire.111

Art as a record of progress upholds a Marxist analysis of Crossing the Platte River, 1872-74, while simultaneously perpetuating the artist’s views. Here, the exchanges between the Native Americans and the landscape creates these measurements of progress. Their presence amongst the western plains was dependent upon the landscape’s idiosyncratic characteristics. The exchanges between the scene further the Anglo narrative of the artist and promote the empire of the United States. While not spoken, the power and class struggle between the two groups is reflective of Marxist themes. They show there was a hierarchical relationship with not just Whittredge and the Native Americans, but also the landscape and the hegemonic role of American Exceptionalism. Ownership of this monumental property of the United States was advanced through Whittredge’s painting, as his rendering ensures a nineteenth-century mindset which is contingent upon cultural

dominance. The inequality of possession is reliant upon the group that collectively prospers from the scene. The Native Americans exist regrettably as property for the nation to aesthetically claim, thereby displaying Marxism within the scene. Again, art provided the superstructure which was ideologically effected by the base, or in this case the property of the American landscape.

In 1838, pioneer Henry Colman (1800-1895) said in regards to the West, “What mighty triumphs of art and labor were here…Such are the great results of intelligent, concentrated, preserving labor; achievements of our own times, and scarcely a quarter of a century old.”112 Here, the enduring theme of art and labor as connected proponents of society was enunciated. Labor as an inherent construct of society perpetuates Marxist connotations throughout the nineteenth-century and the dialogue of America’s inhabitants was riddled with musings about the subject. His sentiments promote modes of production as purveyors of the nation. The language divulges a collective understanding of the weight of these themes. Colman places the West at the center of this intellectual convergence and as the setting for these relationships to transpire.

The perpetual interest in landscape as a means for production provided for economic and political structure. For Whittredge’s painting, the scene is reflective of this theme. The plains as enduring embodiments of American scenery suggest the profits obtained through Manifest Destiny took center stage within the artist’s work. The sentiments of Colman connect to complexities between art and labor in the United States. The timing of Crossing the Platte River, 1872-74, advances these rationalizations just after the Civil War and endorses that Americans used the landscape as an arena upon

which to challenge the significance of their lives and the nation.\textsuperscript{113} Both entities were intertwined with the ideological and political ramifications implicit in the development of the West.

In \textit{Capital}, Marx asserted, “The commodity is an external object, a thing which through its quantities satisfies human needs of whatever kind. The nature of these needs…makes no difference. Nor does it matter here how the thing satisfies man’s need, whether directly as a means of subsistence, i.e. an object of consumption, or indirectly as a means of production.”\textsuperscript{114} The landscape of the West, as illustrated by Whittredge, supports this statement. The landscape operates as the external object, supplying man’s needs. The consumption of the West through property ownership and use of its natural resources interprets the landscape as a commodity. Man’s needs are those which support the advancement of post-Civil War United States, quantifiable and helpful for the whole of the nation.

These views operated in direct contrast to the preceding methods of production. Scholar of American landscape painting, Jay Cantor, articulated,

As records of land alteration brought on by habitation, cultivation and commercial use, their most important constituent is the presence of man in the landscape. Man-made elements … industrialization, territorial expansion, increasing population, immigration and migration, the growing sense of impending national conflict, the opportunities of social mobility—all were breaking down traditional experience of home and community as a locus of shared values and energies.\textsuperscript{115}

Cantor’s rhetoric aligns with Marxist conceptions of the West. These perceptions correspond with Marx’s ideas on commodities and Whittredge’s painting. They discuss how cultivation and industrialization altered perceptions of landscape. The traditional markers of what was an American existence changed. These transformations were the result of both conflict and expansion, both integral modifiers within Marxism. The advancement of society impacted these interactions and correspondingly took shape within the art of the Hudson River School.

This theory is thematically prevalent in Whittredge’s, *On the Plains*, 1872. The painting indicates Whittredge’s shift towards the Barbizon style which would engulf the end of his career. The looser, brushy rendering of the trees speaks to these characteristics and hints to the artist’s change in aesthetics. Whittredge’s style changed however, his subject matter of the West remained constant. While the work is similar to his many images of the West, these details do signify a slight loosening of his style. The delicate shift in the rendering does not dissuade from the Marxist underpinnings implicit the work. The setting remained constant, as Whittredge depicted Native Americans, white frontiersmen, and the picturesque American landscape. His work is typified by these traditional markers and the artist effectively conveys symmetry and balance amongst the scene. This narrative is expressed through contrasting the two groups across from one another on the river and juxtaposing the heavy tree cluster against the distant mountain ranges. Compositional balance was characteristic of Whittredge, and these elements are identifiable through all the paintings discussed in this argument. These features create

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narrative within Whittredge’s work, encouraging the role of Marxism upon American
landscape to take precedence amongst the setting.

As *On the Plains*, 1872, creates this contrast between the Native Americans and
the frontier settlers, the exchange highlights conflict and the underlying problems with
progress. The mythic Old West was the place for these struggles over property ownership
to transpire and the exchanges between the two cultures suggests this struggle. Americans
conquered the landscape and Whittredge’s painting exemplifies this hegemonic
relationship. This idea is aligned with Marxism and in reference to the industrialization of
the nineteenth-century Marx stated, “Private property, as the antithesis to social,
collective property, exists only where the means of labour and the external conditions of
labour belong to private individuals.”

 Connected with the theme of the setting,
Whittredge’s landscape does not belong to the Native Americans. It is the commodity of
the United States, the country’s westward labors supplying the means for this ownership.
The problem for Marx would be that the frontiersmen succeeded because they exploited
the efforts of the Native Americans to achieve this national goal. He continued, “private
property which is personally earned… is supplanted by capitalist private property, which
rests on the exploitation of alien, but formally free labour.”

 His critique of capitalism is
obvious. Marx’s sentiments connect with Whittredge’s setting, as American ownership of
the landscape included a parasitic use of the Native Americans for both aesthetic and
economic gain. The exploitation of this group is documented throughout Whittredge’s
western landscapes and the relationship succeeds in categorizing these Hudson River
School paintings through a dialectical conception of history.

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Whittredge and his Contemporaries: The Broader Impact of Marxism upon the Nineteenth-Century

The ideas behind Marxism saturated the nineteenth-century, finding intellectual influence amongst prominent artistic figures. Whether an artist categorized themselves by the socioeconomic and political belief was inconsequential, as the motives for Marxism enveloped the contextual dialogue and permeated thought. The conceptualization of the nation was a poignant issue for leaders of the nineteenth-century and the way property developed affected the lives of all Americans. The Hudson River School was at the aesthetic convergence of these influences and as such, the paintings served as understandings of these themes. The relationship between art and Marxism is recognizable during the period and takes shape in the rhetoric of prominent art critic, John Ruskin (1819-1900).

While Ruskin was not a socialist, his musings about labor and art production pragmatically relate to Marxist theory. Furthermore, his influence over the Hudson River School was great, as many artists revered his criticisms and meditations about art. Whittredge stated, “Ruskin, his “Modern Painters” just out then, was in every landscape painter’s hand.”119 His statement insinuates the impact of Ruskin was felt throughout the Hudson River School. Ruskin detailed the ideas of power and how they related to art. He expressed, “I think that all the sources of pleasure, or of any other good, to be derived from works of art, may be referred to five distinct heads. The first, ideas of power. —The perception or conception of the mental or bodily powers by which the work has been

produced.”  

His rhetoric aligns with Marxism and the production of art. Power as a construct affecting painting promotes the creation of landscape was reliant upon the productivity of labor. Ruskin implies for the commodification of the material, as the sources of pleasure are likened to that of a good. Thus, the Hudson River School is implicitly based upon economic theory, as they represent a good in their material existence. The property of the United States forms this subject matter.

Ruskin further asserted, “it is physically impossible to employ a great power, except on a great object.”  

This aligns with the westward expansion of the American citizen and landscape painter. Great power was achieved through the accumulation of this landscape as property. In this process, the landscape became a great object for America and subsequently, a great scene for painters. This idea of thrusting power upon an object relates directly to Marxist theory, as the dominant, hegemonic connotation between the painter and the landscape is exposed.  

Furthermore, as this association exists between the subject matter of the Native Americans and the domineering frontiersmen, class conflicts saturate the discussion and promote that the expansion of art through American landscape painting was dependent upon this materialism.

For Ruskin, the Hudson River School was the result of a great work. He deemed all art to be the product of labor, exposing a materialist conception of aesthetics. This perception creates a parallel structure for which his ideas and Marxism exist within the same sphere and project slightly different intellectual narratives. Ruskin articulated,

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121 Ruskin, Modern Painters, 10.
122 Mehmet Tabak, Dialectics of Human Nature in Marx's Philosophy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 54. In Marxist theory, objects are considered forms of property. Property either provides power or social relations.
All art which is worth its room in the world, all art which is not a piece of blundering refuse, occupying the foot or two of earth which, if unencumbered by it, would have grown corn or violets, or some better thing, is art which precedes from an individual mind, working through instruments which assist, but do not supersede, the muscular action of the human mind, upon the materials which most tenderly receive, and most securely retain, the impressions of such human labor.\textsuperscript{123}

Ruskin believed the value of any work of art operated in coordination with the quality of humanity which has been poured into its production.\textsuperscript{124} The unification of art and society is sponsored by his statements and there is attention given to the importance of human labors within these scenes. While the art exists as the individual construct of the human mind, the actual product shows the stimulus provided by a communal dialogue. The outcome is reliant upon labor and a materialist approach.

Marx wrote, “[producing goods] results in commodities which exist separately from the producer, e.g. paintings and all products of art as distinct from the artistic the achievement of the practicing artist.”\textsuperscript{125} Thus, the producer is the artist in this argument and the landscape painting is the product. The Hudson River School paintings exist separately from the artist because their meaning was derivative from intention and more significant in expressing the concerns of the whole of society. This theory connects with Ruskin, as the material conditions of art speak volumes about society. How art was created and the influencers of its production were reliant upon the overarching vision of the United States.

Asher Durand wrote in \textit{The Crayon}, “the ocean prairies of the West, and many other forms of Nature yet spared from the pollutions of civilization, afford a guarantee for

\textsuperscript{124} P. D. Anthony, \textit{John Ruskin's Labor: A Study of Ruskin's Social Theory}, 22.
\textsuperscript{125} Karl Marx et al., \textit{Capital: A Critique of Political Economy}, 1048.
a reputation of originality that you may elsewhere long seek and find not.”¹²⁶ The complexities of civilization are infused within his dialogue. As the nature of the United States was not overly industrialized at this time, it supplied an aesthetic setting for landscape painters to rationalize the location and depict these scenes through a contemplative lens. Their thought processes were conditional upon the understanding that these images were fleeting. The growth of the economy continued to change the West and the property of the nation was urbanizing for the benefit of the whole.

These observations regarding the nineteenth-century American were not solely localized to artistic figures. The correlation between literary figures and art was strong and ideological underpinnings were affected by socioeconomic and political constraints. For the Hudson River School, preceding analyses have dictated the influence of Transcendentalism. While the philosophical movement deals with the individual and the belief that humans are at their best when they are self-reliant within nature, the writings of its key figures connected with the socioeconomics of the United States. Furthermore, their ideas can be viewed through a Marxist lens and these themes take center stage in landscape painting. Transcendentalism expresses a distinctive contrast against materialist rhetoric, as it favors subjective experience over objective facts.¹²⁷ Relying upon Emerson’s 1842 essay, “The Transcendentalist,” allows for these discrepancies to come to the forefront of the discussion. Emerson writes, “In the order of thought, the materialist takes his departure from the external world, and esteems man as a product of that. The idealist takes his departure from consciousness, and reckons the world an appearance.

Mind is the only reality… Nature, literature, [and] history are only subjective phenomena.”128 Here, the exchange trusts that mind is the only reality. However, for Marx and the materialist, the mind cannot be removed from the influences of the external world. These measures of production shape relationships and methods of constructing experience. While Transcendentalism finds intellectual shape in landscape painting, the materialist conditions of the American experience were just as impactful, supporting that the influence of both was inherently necessary for the Hudson River School.

In critique of Transcendentalism, Engels wrote,

Probably the same gentlemen who up to now have decried the transformation of quantity into quality as mysticism and incomprehensible transcendentalism will now declare that it is indeed something quite self-evident, trivial, and commonplace, which they have long employed, and so they have been taught nothing new. But to have formulated for the first time in its universally valid form a general law of development of Nature, society, and thought, will always remain an act of historic importance.129

Engels contrasts the belief that the mind must operate alone. He suggests there is a law of development affecting many elements of the human experience. History, nature, society, and thought operate together to create these interactions and affect man’s relationship with his surroundings. Engels disparaged the self and placed importance upon the societal influences which shape thought.

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) could not remove his transcendental experience from Engels’ laws of development. Thoreau’s Walden exists as a formative example of this concept. The first chapter of his seminal work deals entirely with

economy and Thoreau’s plan to live upon the landscape of his Massachusetts residence. He painstakingly details his plans to use the materials of the landscape for his own methods of production and ability to survive. Thoreau states, “There is an important distinction between the civilized man and the savage; and, no doubt, they have designs on us for our benefit, in making the life of a civilized people an institution, in which the life of the individual is to a great extent absorbed, in order to preserve and perfect that of the race.”\textsuperscript{130} His rhetoric supports Marxist theory, as he submits that the individual is lost to society. Life is made by the whole and the institutional relationships imbued within civilizations’ connection with the land. The “savages” exist in a separate sphere and are therein removed from the institutional, materialist purveyors of society. While they are deeply affected by this exchange, the conflicts imbued allowed for the advancement of the civilized and the conscious removal of the other group.

Thoreau’s convictions connect with the themes of Whittredge’s western landscapes. The relationship between the deemed “uncivilized” Native Americans operated in contrast to the “civilized” frontiersmen. The advancement of American society was dependent upon this relationship and through the accumulation of property, the nation succeeded economically and drove out any groups which came between these financial triumphs. The western renderings of all Hudson River School artists are infused with this dialogue. Their illustrations of this national property are thematically reliant upon Marxist conceptions of history and the way Americans obtained wealth aligns with these themes. These ideas took shape in the dialogue of prominent nineteenth-century figures, supporting that the influence of materialism upon landscape was widespread and

\textsuperscript{130} Henry David Thoreau, \textit{Walden and Other Writings} (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993), 26.
the way Americans conceived of their experience was contingent upon an economic infrastructure which operated for the benefit of the collective nation.
Conclusion
The Illumination of an Artistic Dichotomy: The Intersection of Polarizing Philosophies within American Landscape Painting

Based on this comprehensive evidence, it is unmistakable how capitalism and Marxism coexisted within the thematic structure of the Hudson River School. A dialogue suggesting the multivalent nature of these paintings is significant, as it reinforces the coaction of these philosophies impermeably shaped representations of property in nineteenth-century landscape painting. The conversation further displays the philosophical motivations which indelibly shaped American perceptions of the landscape of their country. Property exhibits a congruous example, proving the ability for the Hudson River School movement to live within two contrasting sociopolitical domains. Property existed within two spheres and through these ideologies, capitalism and Marxism shaped the economic, political, and artistic infrastructure of the United States.

Worthington Whittredge unconsciously illustrated both philosophies throughout his career. His images of northeastern agrarianism spoke to the productivity of the individual. The singular representation of the farm’s ability to provide for the individual supports a capitalist narrative and highlights the value of work within landscape painting. His images survive in a realm which seamlessly connects to the ideological views of Adam Smith. Smith’s rhetoric regarding the labors of the individual ultimately benefiting the whole of society correlates to these scenes. The American farm existed at a tumultuous time in the history of the country. Despite this, its role within the American economy remained immeasurably significant. Through capitalism, these places succeeded and failed based on the labors of the individuals that worked these landscapes, shaping the economy of the United States. These paintings by Whittredge endure to show these
critical exchanges and emphasize this setting’s importance within the constructs of nature.

Furthermore, the American West provided a location for Marxist conceptions of art history to take hold upon the visual dialogue of the Hudson River School. The collective ownership of a national property allowed the United States to grow exponentially and acquire a means to support its inhabitants. Through conflict with the Native Americans and a hegemonic relationship with other cultures, Americans materialistically approached the landscape of the West. The nation’s existence from the start was dependent upon providing for the growth of the country. The narratives within Whittredge’s landscapes supply the visual evidence for this theory. His images of the plains suggest a more complex narrative, conditional on the materials within the setting. Each facet of nature provided for the advancement of these exploring frontiersmen and engaged the viewer with multifaceted cultural relationships. Marx emphasized that, “Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.”131 Society, nature, and thought impacted Whittredge’s landscapes of the West. The relationship with the landscape was determined by these material influences and a Marxist approach to these paintings supports this theory.

Whittredge was not the only Hudson River School artist to display the philosophies of capitalism and Marxism. This thesis merely scratches the surface of the discussion about how the socioeconomic and political structure of the United States impacted these renderings of the landscape. More research is required upon each artist to further articulate these two ideologies took hold over their interpretations of the country.

The Hudson River School was a poignant moment in American painting, indicative of observational interpretations about the natural and material landscape of the country. These understandings resulted in beautiful and ideologically intricate illustrations of what was aesthetically and economically beneficial to the social landscape of nineteenth-century society. Each artist within this group can respectively serve as a case study to support both philosophies and as such, this thesis serves as an inaugural example for these investigations.

The images of the Hudson River School were multivalent, and they survive to show varying degrees of understanding about nineteenth-century American property. Americans living within these ideological opposites is not solely a predominant construct from past generations. It is a perpetual concept, reflective of our complex understanding of ourselves. American art visually displays this theory and provides confirmation of the presence of capitalism and Marxism within the aesthetics of the United States. While this thesis has explored the dichotomy within the Hudson River School, these socioeconomic and political theories are attributable to styles of painting across centuries. American art is representative of a unique rationalization regarding the infrastructure of the country and its impactful relationship with painting. The landscape of America remains as property to this day and aspirations toward acquiring the “American Dream” continue to saturate the mindset of the nation. Because of this, the art of the United States is predisposed to these socioeconomic and political themes. The contrast will be forever prevalent, as the bond between Americans and property endures as a measure of both personal and national success.
Fig. 1.1. John Smibert, *Francis Brinley*, 1729, oil on canvas, 50 x 39 ¼ in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York
Fig. 1.2 Ralph Earl, *Esther Boardman*, 1789, oil on canvas, 42½ x 32 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York
Fig. 1.3. Thomas Cole, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*, 1836, oil on canvas, 51 ½ x 76 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York

Fig. 1.4. Worthington Whittredge, *Landscape with Hay Wain*, 1861, oil on canvas, 15 13/16 x 30 11/16 in., Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio
Fig. 1.5. Worthington Whittredge, *The Clam Diggers*, 1866, oil on canvas, 10 ½ x 7/10 in., Private Collection

Fig. 1.6. Worthington Whittredge, *A Home by the Seaside*, 1872, oil on canvas, 20 x 31 1/16 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California
Fig. 1.7. Worthington Whittredge, *Old Homestead by the Sea*, 1883, oil on canvas, 21 7/8 x 31 7/8 in., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Boston, Massachusetts

Fig. 1.8. Worthington Whittredge, *Harvest Time: Summer in Farmington Valley*, 1900, oil on canvas, 15 ¼ x 22 7/8 in., Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey
Fig. 2.1. Charles Willson Peale, *George Washington*, ca. 1779-81, oil on canvas, 95 x 61 ¾ in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York

Fig. 2.2. Frederic Edwin Church, *Niagara*, 1857, oil on canvas, 40 x 90 ½ in., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Fig. 2.3. Worthington Whittredge, *Encampment on the Platte River*, 1865, oil on canvas, 12 ¾ in x 16 ½ in., American Museum of Western Art- the Anschutz Collection, Denver, Colorado

Fig. 2.4. Worthington Whittredge, *Indian Encampment*, 1870-76, oil on canvas, 14 ½ x 22 in., Private Collection
Fig. 2.5. Worthington Whittredge, *Crossing the Platte River*, 1872-74, oil on canvas, 40 x 60 ½ in., the White House, Washington, D.C.
Fig. 2.6. Worthington Whittredge, *On the Plains*, 1872, oil on canvas, 30 x 50 in., St. Johnsbury Atheneum, St. Johnsbury, Vermont
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