

Manifest Destiny Idealism in the Nature, Paintings and Writings of John James Audubon

In Jake Kosek's *Understories*, he referenced late 19th century proto-environmentalists and conservationists John Muir and George Perkins Marsh. The two worked within a society who, according to Kosek depicts "notions of whiteness and superiority relied deeply on formations of nature," which included manifest destiny. The natural flow of events of manifest destiny included the displacement and attempt of genocide of indigenous populations. This also included sentiments and individual actions towards (non-human) animals that did not reflect an Anglo concept of nature. For example, when John Muir travelled to California's Sierra Nevada Mountains, he spoke ill of not only indigenous populations, but also Chinese immigrant workers, Hispano herders, and their sheep because he believed they obstructed nature's purity by their mere presence.

Beliefs held by figures such as Muir had its predecessors, such as 19th century naturalist and painter John James Audubon. In this paper, I will argue that Audubon's rhetoric took part in the creation of manifest destiny despite receiving praise from scholars of holding more positive views of non-whites and of animals than his contemporaries and later naturalists like Muir. Audubon did this by positing positive depictions of Anglo-squatters in order to counter negative ones, as well as juxtaposing non-whites and non-human animals such as the wolf as threats. Firstly, I will give a sketch of his life and point to how it relates to manifest destiny as an ideology. Secondly, I will focus on the squatter element of manifest destiny. From there, I will compare Audubon's lauding of squatters and their business pursuits to the writings and actions of preceding and contemporary squatters in the West. Next, I will relate ideals held by naturalists such as Muir and depict how Audubon created avenues for said ideals based on his perceptions of indigenous populations (and wolves) over time. Ultimately, I will argue that Audubon's views became progressively worse as he grew older and began to mirror Muir's.