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HOW PHOTOGRAPHY CHANGED LANDSCAPE REPRESENTATION OF THE AMERICAN WEST

Landscape representations of the American West changed substantially after the American Civil War as photographs by men such as William Henry Jackson, Charles Roscoe Savage and Timothy H. O'Sullivan replaced drawings by landscape artists like Alfred Jacob Miller, Heinrich Balduin Möllhausen and Charles Preuss. Images before the 1860s tended to be illustrations in reports of government-funded exploration expeditions before popular magazines such as Harper's Weekly and Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper became popular after the Civil War with extensive use of line drawings made from photographs soon after the home stereoscope became widely used as a means of viewing three-dimensional photographs of American landscapes,

American landscape artists before the 1860s tried to capture what they felt from viewing a landscape, which entailed shrinking the foreground to emphasize distant terrain and by doubling or tripling the height of distant mountains. Although photography came to America in 1839 with the Daguerreotype, it was not successfully used on a government expedition until 1854 and was not widely used to portray landscapes for another 15 years. As landscape photographs became ubiquitous in the 1870s, the style of landscape representation changed from portraying the emotions felt by artists to scientific representation of how they actually appeared. One of the best-known examples of photographic representation is the images of what is now Yellowstone National Park that helped persuade Congress to establish the park in 1872.

This presentation will use images of landscapes of the western United States by landscape artists before the Civil War and by photographers after the Civil War to explain the fundamental way in which photography changed that representation.