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The Bronze Captive: American Identity Within the Mary Jemison Monument

Alissa Michelle Frese

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Arts

James R. Swensen, Chair
Marian Wardle
Allen J. Christenson

Department of Comparative Arts and Letters
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Beginning with the first European colonists in the New World, captivity has been means of cultural exchange between whites and Native Americans. The narratives recounting the captives’ experiences became popular literature which inspired visual artists who reinterpreted the tales to coincide with their cultural needs. In the early twentieth century, progressive reformer, William Pryor Letchworth, hired artist Henry Kirke Bush-Brown to create a sculpture of captive Mary Jemison who, instead of returning to her natal culture, chose to stay among the Seneca becoming fully assimilated. Aligning with their progressive values, their perception of her character is reflected in the *Mary Jemison Monument*. The monument creates an image of the ideal woman, immigrant, and Native American who holds and practices white middle-class values of strength, independence, and determination. Exemplifying these American values, the sculpture accesses an American identity emphasizing the acceptance and practice of these supposedly American traits. Immigrants and Native Americans could become fully Americanized by adopting these characteristics and leaving their traditional ways behind. Contingent on their assimilation of white middle-class values, the perceived problems facing a diversified society could be eliminated. In so doing, a more harmonious America aligning with Letchworth’s beliefs could be created.

Keywords: Mary Jemison, Henry Kirk Bush-Brown, captivity narrative, Native American, Progressive Era, immigration, assimilation, America, William Pryor Letchworth
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DEDICATION

To my mother and father, Robert and Pamela Frese, and sister, Allaire.

Because they are the best.
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Introduction

Captivity narratives have inspired the human imagination for centuries. European readers could vicariously leave civilized society and enter foreboding, exotic lands throughout the world as captive stories emerged from Ceylon to North Africa. From the Americas, readers encountered unknown Native American cultures and experienced the purportedly gruesome horrors committed by so-called “savages”. The numerous accounts of captures, escapes, rescues, indigenous life, and strange cultural encounters quickly turned captivity narratives into one of the most popular literary genres from the 1600s to the twentieth century.¹ Literary scholar Annette Kolodny argued that these histories are some of the first examples of a distinctly American literature as they related events taking place on the American continent with native cultures only found in the New World.² Their enthralling storylines inspired the imaginations of writers and artists as they conceptualized then externalized their visions in print, paint, and sculpture. Painters and sculptors transformed these narratives into visual tales. Each image reflects its contemporary reception of its source narrative, as is the case with the Mary Jemison Monument.

The Mary Jemison Monument found in Letchworth State Park along the banks of the Genesee River in western New York is one artistic rendition of a captivity narrative (Fig. 1). Erected in 1910, the monument depicts the fully-assimilated Native American captive, Mary Jemison, as she arrives in the Genesee Valley in the mid-eighteenth century. The monument fulfills certain cultural needs of the early twentieth century by reconfirming an American identity based on various character traits attributed to Jemison which aligned with particular progressive values. After reading her personal narrative, artist Henry Kirke Bush-Brown and his patron,

² Ibid.
William Pryor Letchworth believed Jemison displayed values that coincided with their progressive goals, making her their version of an optimal American citizen. The monument becomes an instructive tool speaking to a wide audience. As the embodiment of the ideal woman, immigrant, and Native American, it teaches each group to accept and practice American traits of strength, independence, and determination at a time when they needed to be incorporated into mainstream white society.

In literary spheres, Native American captive narratives have been thoroughly researched and discussed in a multitude of theoretical approaches. However, these investigations only began emerging in the 1970s and reached their peak during the 1990s and 2000s, thereby leaving the connection between the stories and the visual arts they inspired virtually untouched. Paintings, engravings, and sculptures based on captivity narratives reflect the contemporary cultural attitudes and public reception regarding these stories. The ways in which these captives are depicted expands our understanding of the complicated relationship between Native Americans, Anglo-Americans, and the intermingling of their cultures since their first encounters in the fifteenth century.

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In the past there have been some attempts at creating these connections. Scholars like June Namais have briefly discussed captive imagery as related to specific narratives, but much remains to be discovered. As a historian, Namais analyzes female stereotypes within captive narratives while using artworks to illustrate cultural perceptions of the women in these stories, but her artistic analyses remain mostly cursory, focusing on the narrative instead.\(^4\) Literary scholar, Sara Humphreys, has discussed the images of Hannah Duston, who, like Mary Jemison, has monuments dedicated to her.\(^5\) Humphrey’s work uses various depictions of the Duston narrative, including monuments and decorative objects to discover how her image was mass produced and used to reinforce white cultural superiority by emphasizing the deaths of her Native American captors. Although she discusses these images, her focus remains on their inherent violence and continual degradation of Native Americans ignoring some of the more complex, in depth aspects of Anglo/Native relationships.

Other considerations of white captives have also been included as tangential findings in wider studies on images of slavery, which does not allow for much depth.\(^6\) Meanwhile other literary scholars such as Joy S. Kasson consider the ramifications of captivity, but merely focus on the violence portrayed as a method of encouraging Native American extermination or expressing fears of sexually tainting white womanhood. Previous research on the subject either lacks an incorporation into a wider historical context, relating the relationship between narrative and image, or ignores the complicated aspects of captivity.\(^7\)

\(^4\) See Namais, *White Captives*.
The Mary Jemison Monument takes part in this complex relationship by fulfilling the progressive goals of Letchworth and Bush-Brown. Jemison had a particular meaning to them which they interpreted through an early 1900s lens. They then utilized their interpretation to design and erect a monument that fulfilled their contemporary needs, such as easing their cultural anxieties in a time of rapid change. Their distinctive depiction creates a peculiar interpretation worthy of exploration within its wider historic and theoretical context.

This thesis and its discussion of the Mary Jemison Monument was influenced by socio-historical and feminist thought. Socio-historical theories revealed the context in which the monument was created while also illuminating the meaning of Mary Jemison during the Progressive Era. Whereas feminist thought relates the changing view of women in the early twentieth century, helping fit the Mary Jemison Monument within its feminine context. Subaltern studies were also influential since Jemison was adopted into Seneca culture, thereby making her a minority figure whose experiences affected her larger world, both during her lifetime in the nineteenth century and later at the time of the monument’s construction.

Meanwhile, post-colonial studies will also assist this investigation. Together, these various
approaches will help illuminate the monument’s meaning at that particular moment during the
Progressive Era. According to the monument’s commissioner and sculptor, Mary Jemison
embodied white middle-class values of independence, strength, and determination making her
the ideal woman, immigrant, and Native American. It was perceived that as these groups
accepted and displayed these values they became fully American.

**Captivity Narratives as Literature and Art**

Couched in a larger tradition of captive narratives, an understanding of their history helps
clarify the monument’s heritage. The earliest American captive narratives were written by
Spanish conquistadors in the sixteenth century as they dominated Latin America. The genre was
established and popularized, though, during the seventeenth century by the British who recorded
numerous captures which took place as they established colonies throughout the world. In time
the captivity narrative became strongly associated with the Americas as numerous accounts
relating capture, release, or assimilation originated from the continents’ shores. One of the
oldest accounts dedicated solely to a single captive’s experience appeared in 1542 when Álvar
Núñez Cabeza de Vaca published his tale. Within his account he relates the years he spent
among the various tribes of the American Southwest and Mexico. Some of the most prominent
narratives, though, come from New England.¹⁰ Mary Rowlandson’s tale, *A Narrative of the
Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682) helped institute the archetypal
elements of the genre, making it one of the most recognized captivity narratives. The tale
establishes the traditional plot as she is violently abducted, witnesses the deaths of family

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¹⁰ The genre developed simultaneously with the British colonization of the region. For more on the development of
British captivity literature see Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850* (London: Jonathan
Cape, 2002).
members, is reduced to a slave within a tribal community, and is eventually ransomed by her white community. Throughout these tales, the protagonist’s struggles to remain pure while surrounded by a savage society create a key plot point. The common trope of the violent, depraved, and slothful Native is spotlighted in comparison to the virtuous, God-fearing, Puritan woman trying to survive. This common story arc endorses the need to protect white civilization by demonizing the Native. Concurrently with these more common violent depictions, a second kind of trope emerged: the willing captive.

The willing captive, although violently abducted, chooses to stay with his or her captors, typically becoming fully assimilated within the tribe’s culture. Historically, examples of willing captives are as old as captive narratives themselves. Reports of white captives unwilling to return to their natal society have been recorded since 1519 when Hernán Cortés discovered Gonzalo Guerrero and Gerónimo de Aguilar who were shipwrecked off the Yucatan Peninsula ten years previously. Although Aguilar joined Cortés, becoming one of his interpreters, Guerrero remained, having married, fathered children, and obtained high status among the local Maya. Guerrero’s story is treated like an aside in Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s memoir, yet it records the complex relations and realities between Europeans and Native Americans.¹¹ Such examples evince that a satisfying life could be lived among the New World tribes as assimilation occurred which contrasts with the degraded slave status of unassimilated captives. Stories similar to Guerrero’s occurred throughout the Americas. In the early eighteenth century, Reverend John Williams recounted his daughter’s capture in The Redeemed Captive, Returning to Zion (1707). Although he had raised the funds for her ransom, Williams’ daughter refused to return and later married a Native man. Within the narrative, Williams laments his daughter’s

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choices, but overall her life appears to have been content. The willing captive narrative only gained wide popularity after the publication of James Fenimore Cooper’s fictional account of Delaware-raised Natty Bumpo in *The Pioneers: or The Sources of the Susquehanna* in 1823.

Cooper’s novel was soon followed Mary Jemison’s true-life account, *The Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* in 1824 by James E. Seaver which proved immensely popular from its first printing. The willing captive’s popularity resonated with the contemporary interest in scientific categorization and the romantic yearnings of the nineteenth century. These narratives provided an inside account of Native American society from captives fully adopted as tribal members, giving their stories an air of authenticity. Meanwhile, through their pages Romantic readers could escape white civilization as they imagined themselves in the captive’s place believing the captives had returned to a purer state closer to nature.

As these stories were published the tropes of captivity narratives, both violent and sympathetic, inspired the visual arts. Works such as *Osage Scalp Dance* in 1845 by John Mix Stanley create a terrifying image of an unarmed woman and child surrounded by spear-wielding Native men preparing to take her scalp (Fig. 2). The warriors revel over their defenseless victims, making them appear like uncivilized, immoral demons. Similarly, in George Caleb Bingham’s *Captured by Indians* from 1848, an anxious white mother sits in the darkness surrounded by Native American guards as a young boy sleeps in her lap (Fig. 3). She casts her eyes upwards, pleading for divine intervention to save her and the child. Likewise, in *The Abduction of Daniel Boone’s Daughter by the Indians* by Charles Ferdinand Wimar in 1853, Boone’s daughter clasps her hands and also casts her eyes heavenward, praying for deliverance, afraid for her life (Fig. 4). Each emphasized victimized white womanhood as their combined

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12 Namais, 91-92.
13 Kolodny, 190.
pleas beg for rescue, presumably from a white male. The women depicted behave similarly to
the accounts of Mary Rowlandson and others who continuously prayed and relied on a higher
power for release.\textsuperscript{14}

These images of the violent capture persisted to the end of the nineteenth century,
becoming even more graphic. For example, Couse’s \textit{The Captive} done in 1891 illustrates a
Native American chieftain contemplating a virginal white woman’s corpse (Fig. 5).\textsuperscript{15} Rather
than be tarnished by the chief’s sexual advances, the young woman chooses death. She becomes
a martyr for white purity by keeping her bloodline free from baser societies. During the century,
as Manifest Destiny swept the United States, the victimized white woman expressed the
transgressions of the Native population who must either be civilized or removed. White settlers
believed America’s innocence as an untouched paradise was betrayed as Native Americans
sexually violated and murdered white women.\textsuperscript{16} Their violation led white men to believe
conquering the West as a just cause.\textsuperscript{17} A popular method to remove the Native American threat
in the 1890s was through assimilation. As Native Americans were assimilated into white society
the senseless deaths, like the one depicted in \textit{The Captive}, would end.

Similar to captive literature, willing captive imagery developed alongside the more
common violent depictions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Benjamin West’s sketch,
\textit{The Indians Delivering up the English Captives to Colonel Bouquet near his camp at the forks of
Muskingum in North America in Novr. 1764} provides an early example (Fig. 6). Depicting a

\textsuperscript{14} Instances of Mary Rowlandson praying or relying on God for strength and release can be found in Mary
Rowlandson’s \textit{The Sovereignty and Goodness of God} (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997): 71-72, 74, 76-77, 82, 84, 86-87, 90, 93, 103.
\textsuperscript{15} Couse’s painting is based on the story of Lorinda Bewley, who was captured during Oregon’s notorious Whitman
Massacre (1847). Chief Five Crows wanted her as a wife, but she refused and eventually returned to white society.
\textsuperscript{16} Patricia Nelson Limerick, \textit{The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West} (New York: W.W.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
historical event, West’s sketch shows nude European children shrinking away from the impeccably dressed colonel, preferring their Native parents instead. Meanwhile in the background white women clasp mixed-race children devastated by their forced departure. The women in the work had formed strong familial bonds during their time among the tribe as they married and had children. West’s sketch indicates the women’s lives and identities have merged with their Native families rather than their natal white culture. They have fully assimilated and prefer their new Native American culture over their original one.

Later, in the nineteenth century as Romanticism developed, Anglo-American society desired an escape from civilization and closer proximity to nature which willing captive images provided. The white protagonists in captivity narratives appealed to Romantic sentiments as they left civilization to live in a purer wilderness and purer state of existence. Alongside the narratives, Romanticized images of captives also emerged. Sculptures such as Joseph Mozier’s *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish* (1866) and Chauncey Bradley Ives’ *The Willing Captive* (1871), both depicting white women who assimilated to Native cultures, appeared after the willing captive narrative’s popularization (Figs. 7 & 8). In these works, the two women are idyllic and innocent, appearing more like nymphs of nature than women with character. Mozier’s captive, based on a poem about an abducted white girl, lacks psychological depth as she poses with a delicate hand against her chin, eyes downcast, and modestly accepting the viewer’s gaze, her features locked in classical stoicism. She becomes an object to be gazed upon and dismissed as an aesthetic experience. Ives’ work, although more emotionally charged, binds his captive to nature as she primitively exposes her breast like her semi-nude Native husband. Their nakedness reveals them to be closer to their natural state in a culture of innocence like Adam and Eve in the
Garden. The young woman stands in stark contrast to her mother draped in puritan garb, begging her daughter to come back to white civilization.

As Romanticism waned, the captivity narrative tradition continued and was used for different means by the 1900s. In comparison to Ives’ and Mozier’s nineteenth-century works, The Mary Jemison Monument propels the willing captive narrative into a more elevated sphere by adding depth and psychological complexity. Jemison is not depicted as a product of untouched nature like her neoclassical predecessors. Instead, she is heroicized. Unlike Mozier’s and Ives’ static poses, the monument has movement and is meant to convey a didactic message to its contemporary viewers. The monument depicts her as a woman of substantive character added to the canon of white American heroes in order to instill progressive white American middle-class values of strength, independence, and endurance in its viewers.

The Allure of the Mary Jemison Narrative

Erected in 1910, the Mary Jemison Monument sought to immortalize its namesake, Mary Jemison, who became one of the embodiments of the willing captive. William Pryor Letchworth and Henry Kirke Bush-Brown read her biography and derived the monument and the values it displays from it. Familiarity with her life story deepens the monument’s meaning by recognizing the life Jemison led.

Mary Jemison was born aboard ship in 1743 as her Irish parents immigrated to the British colonies which would become the United States. Eventually the family settled on the Pennsylvania frontier near present-day Gettysburg. In 1758, during the French and Indian War (1756-1763), a combined group of Frenchmen and Shawnee Indians attacked and captured most of the Jemison family along with a neighbor’s son and daughter. For several days the beleaguered captives marched through the Pennsylvania wilderness until one night moccasins
were placed on fourteen-year-old Mary Jemison’s and her young male neighbor’s feet.\textsuperscript{18} According to the narrative, Jemison’s mother recognized the gesture and knew her daughter would be allowed to live whereas she and the rest would not. In their last moments together, Jane Jemison encouraged her daughter to say her prayers and remember her family. Jemison and the boy were separated from the others as the remaining captives were scalped and killed. Her family’s death was confirmed for Jemison the next day when she recognized her mother’s scalp in the hands of one of her Shawnee captors.

Shortly thereafter, she and her companion were taken to Fort Duquesne (modern-day Pittsburgh) where they were separated and adopted by different Native families. Mary Jemison was taken in by two Seneca sisters and their mother, then moved to her new home down the Ohio River. Upon reaching their village, Jemison was ritually dressed and her tattered European garb discarded (Fig. 9). She was renamed Deh-Ge-Wa-Nus, meaning a pretty girl or a pleasant thing, and from that day forward Mary Jemison slowly assimilated Seneca ways.\textsuperscript{19} She learned the language and prepared Seneca meals while she and her village migrated between their summer camp at a confluence of the Shenanjee and Ohio Rivers and their winter camp where the Sciota River meets the Ohio.

In 1760, Jemison married a Delaware man named Sheninjee. By her own account she loved him and was content in her adopted Seneca culture.\textsuperscript{20} In 1762 she gave birth to their son, Thomas. As time continued, Jemison’s Seneca sisters moved to the center of their tribe in western New York near current-day Rochester. Her sisters then wished for Jemison and her family to join them. Accompanied by her two indigenous brothers-in-law, Jemison strapped her

\textsuperscript{18} Historians believe Jemison was more likely fourteen at the time of her capture rather than twelve and Jemison was mistaken about the year of her capture due to old age.

\textsuperscript{19} James E. Seaver, \textit{A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison} (New York: Corinth Books, 1975), 46.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 53, 55.
toddler to her back and made the six-hundred-mile trek to the Genesee River Valley. She remained there, despite attempts to redeem her for ransom by her extended Seneca family, until 1833 when she left for the Buffalo Creek Reservation where she passed away two years later.

While she still lived in the Genesee River Valley, increasing numbers of European settlers arrived in western New York during the early nineteenth century. As the number of settlers grew the local legend of Mary Jemison, the “White Woman of the Genesee,” thrived as a neighborhood curiosity. The tale eventually caught the attention of James E. Seaver who met with Jemison for three days in 1823 to record her life story. His efforts were published as *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, which became instantly popular, outselling works by Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper.21

As the first authentic voice of a fully assimilated captive, the narrative’s popularity thrived on the public’s insatiable curiosity. Like captive narratives before it, the Jemison story resonated with the period’s desire for a logical understanding of the world as well as the era’s Romantic urges. The period’s empirical need for observation and categorization were satiated by Seaver’s interjections where he insists on his authentic relation. In his preface he writes, “Strict fidelity has been observed in the composition: consequently, no circumstance has been intentionally exaggerated by the paintings of fancy, not by fine flashes of rhetoric: neither has the picture been rendered more dull than the original. Without the aid of fiction, what was received as matter of fact, only has been recorded.”22 By asserting there are no exaggerations in his record, Seaver hoped to emphasize the narrative’s accuracy. In a scientific, proto- anthropological vein, he attempted to capture a culture seemingly without bias thereby creating his perception of the truth about Seneca society to a white audience. Although well-intentioned,

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21 Kolonday, 190.
22 Seaver, xi-xii.
his work unwittingly revealed preconceived notions of race as he sought to reveal the unknown aspects of Seneca culture while his phrasing and word choice exposed a white bias by suggesting the savage, primitive nature of Native American cultures.

Unlike Cooper’s fictionalized account, Jemison’s narrative reveals a non-fictional account of a woman taken and raised in a Native American culture. Her narrative challenged many Native American stereotypes believed in 1824. One of which concerned the relationship between Native American husbands and wives. Purportedly, Native men were lazy, cruel, alcoholics and their wives were simply subservient drudges. According to Jemison, this was not true. She states her labors were not more difficult than those of most white women, nor was she treated poorly by either of her husbands.23 Her words provided a contemporary insight into the male/female relations among the Seneca revealing previously unknown culture and debunking stereotypical myths. Meanwhile her narrative also suited the wistful escapist yearnings of the Romanticists as she describes an exotic culture suffused with her own personable recollections.

Despite its popularity, after several editions interest in the Jemison story waned by the 1850s. Her obscurity was short-lived, however, when her narrative was revived by an interested businessman from Buffalo.

**Resurrecting Jemison**

In 1859, William Pryor Letchworth, a successful philanthropic industrialist from Buffalo, New York, purchased several plots of land, condensing them into a seventeen-mile-long estate named Glen Iris as a retreat from city life.24 After its purchase, he learned that his recent acquisition incorporated land that once belonged to willing captive, Mary Jemison. His interest

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23 Seaver, 55, 53, 113. Jemison’s first husband, Sheninjee, died shortly after her departure for the Genesee Valley. She later remarried a prominent Seneca man named Hiokatoo.
was piqued. Enamored of Jemison’s history and character, he began revitalizing her story as a personal project. Eventually, he located the plates used to print the original 1824 narrative and began republishing it in 1880, delivering new editions every few years. Although Letchworth added a new introduction which he wrote, the text remained the same. As he read the narrative he came to believe Jemison possessed admirable character traits coinciding with his notion of American ideals.

When Mary Jemison’s remains were threatened by erosion in 1874, her descendants asked Letchworth to move her from her original internment site on the Buffalo Creek Reservation to his estate along the Genesee River. He consented and moved her to a hill where he had already preserved and moved other historical Seneca structures including the Seneca Council House. Even with her remains reinterred and a marble marker placed on her burial site, Letchworth still desired to create a more fitting monument.

His enthusiasm for monument building was consistent with the sculptural impulses of his day. From the 1860s through the early 1900s, monument production in the United States was at its peak. As the nation struggled to redefine itself in the wake of the Civil War, monuments were erected to establish and form an American identity based on white middle-class values. They celebrated generals and soldiers, holding them up as the ideal Americans who sacrificed for a worthy cause. Monuments, however, also select and exhibit a national collective memory. Monuments choose to remember history in a certain way, exemplifying these moments and figures as the best mankind has to offer. These ideas were taught to the public and transferred

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25 Ibid., 45.
26 The council house was historically used as a meeting place by Seneca tribal leaders.
from generation to generation, creating a national collective memory. Mary Jemison’s monument, also erected during the monument boom, is an extension of this cultural desire as commissioner and artist sought to directly transmit cultural values through the sculpture’s subtle details as they heroicized Mary Jemison’s character.

Beyond being a grave marker, Letchworth wanted the bronze sculpture to be a recognized work of art. Having served as president for the Fine Arts Academy in Buffalo from 1871 to 1874, the industrialist understood what was needed to elevate the monument to fine art. He organized a commission board and contacted renowned sculptor, Henry Kirke Bush-Brown in 1908 to create the work and lend the monument prestige.29

First trained by his sculptor uncle, Henry Kirke Brown, Bush-Brown was heavily influenced by the elder man’s convictions.30 After spending four years in Italy like most sculptors, Brown grew weary of Neoclassicism in 1846 and returned to the United States wanting to create uniquely American sculptures through realism.31 Bush-Brown maintained his uncle’s realistic style through historically accurate details in his sculptures. After his foundational exposure to sculpture and bronze casting in his uncle’s studio, Bush-Brown trained at the Académie Julian in Paris and the National Academy of Design where he learned the realistic academic style he would carry throughout his career. In the 1890s, he completed acclaimed monuments of Generals George Meade and John F. Reynolds for Gettysburg and, in

28 Ibid.
29 This board was comprised of Charles M. Dow (Chairman), Dr. George F. Kunz, and Dr. Edward Hagaman Hall. His desire for the monument to be a recognized work of art is also illustrated in his letter dated July 2, 1907, where he wants the American Historic and Scenic Preservation Society to approve it. As a precursor to the National Parks Administration, the society’s main task was preserving the natural landscape and erecting monuments. At the time of the Jemison monument’s construction, Kunz was the society’s acting president.
31 Ibid., 67
1900, a bust of Isaac Hull for the Dewey Arch in New York City. His multiple works established him as an accomplished artist of his time.\textsuperscript{32}

Bush-Brown’s qualifications and acclaim made him an astute choice to fulfill Letchworth’s goals. Letchworth wanted a work that reflected Seneca history as accurately as possible. Bush-Brown’s previous works proved him to be equal to the task due to the attention he paid to historical accuracy in accoutrements and costume. As a uniquely American subject, Mary Jemison fit within Bush-Brown’s purview. His monuments helped create an American identity by displaying his subjects as ideal Americans who possessed admirable qualities. These monuments were meant to help uplift society by creating American heroes worthy of emulation. This was of particular importance during the Progressive Era (1890-1920).

Progressivism was, in essence, the optimistic desire to improve the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Methods for societal improvement varied as greatly as the political opinions of the era as progressive reformers vied for and against immigration, women’s suffrage, and temperance. Some reformers’ efforts centered on behavioral and cultural instruction to instill the white, protestant, Anglo-American values like strength, independence, and perseverance in their charges thereby molding the lower classes in their own self-image in order to build their idea of a superior society. For reformers like Edwin Howland Blashfield, art was the answer. In 1912 he wrote, “Public and municipal art is a public and municipal educator. The decoration of temples and cathedrals and town halls has naturally taught patriotism, morals, and aesthetics, in a far larger sense than has that of private palaces or houses, admirable as the latter has often been.”\textsuperscript{33} It was in public spaces where every social class gathered and they could all be

\textsuperscript{32} Built to celebrate Admiral George Dewey’s victory at the Battle of Manila Bay (1898), the arch stood in Madison Square until its destruction in 1900.

\textsuperscript{33} Edwin Howland Blashfield, \textit{Mural Painting in America: The Scammon Lectures delivered before the Art Institute of Chicago, March, 1912} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 24-25.
educated on elevated principles. Although Blashfield primarily spoke about murals and decoration in public buildings, municipal art in the period also extended to public monuments.

William Pryor Letchworth was of a similar mindset to progressive reformers. He wanted to uplift lower-class women, children, the worker, immigrant, and disabled through his philanthropy and by instilling Anglo-American values in them. Through the *Mary Jemison Monument*, Letchworth and Bush-Brown jointly expressed their perception that Jemison possessed white American middle-class values. In memorializing her, Letchworth insisted that she was a defining historic character worthy of idolization. While designing the monument with Bush-Brown, the two made many choices that best defined her personal character which they believed represented American national identity and behavior and coincided with their progressive values. The monument they designed and created was a symptom of larger anxieties in the early 1900s as America sought an identity as the nation rapidly grew.

In creating public sculptures, commissioners reaffirmed their values which helped ease their anxieties regarding the turn of the century. Taking historical figures, the public monument molded history to fit within current ideologies and values. Meanwhile, sculptors and their patrons ignored the complicated aspects of historical events by emphasizing those aspects they wanted to be shown, thus depicting what they chose to remember. In essence, the *Mary Jemison Monument* took a figure from early American history and eased fears concerning a diversified America by applying American traits to her while emphasizing her Seneca background. Their design illustrated that a stable American identity can be formed through the

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34 Larned, 90.
35 Doss, 2; 53.
37 Ibid.
assimilation of different classes and races as they accept white middle-class values. A part of their conception of American identity, as portrayed through the *Mary Jemison Monument*, is the ideal American woman, immigrant, and Native American.

**Mary Jemison as the Ideal Woman**

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, a new concept of womanhood was emerging in America and Britain among the middle and upper classes as women gained higher education and entered the professional world. The new ideal stressed female intellect, education, individuality, and independence. Women began entering the workforce in greater numbers and with their pay they could more readily make their own decisions regarding their persons. They voiced their opinion both privately and publically as they fought for social and political reform. These women were independent, capable, and, often, concerned for humanity’s welfare. They quickly made their way into literature appearing as Henry James’ title character, Daisy Miller. Likewise, they found visual representation as Charles Dana Gibson’s Gibson Girl who could be found outdoors boldly participating in an active lifestyle (Fig. 10). The same characteristics found in these contemporary expressions of new womanhood were also placed on pioneer women from the recent past who, Progressive Era women believed, first developed these distinctly female American traits.

In the early 1900s it was believed the West had been conquered, causing a strong nostalgia for the frontier, including the eighteenth century frontier. \(^{38}\) This was confirmed at the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893, where Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” wherein he declared the frontier closed based on data from the 1890 U.S. Census. His thesis reflected the pervading view regarding the

American West which Letchworth would have shared. Theodore Roosevelt recognized the feelings of the era as he wrote to Turner concerning his thesis stating, “I think you have struck some first class ideas, and have put into definite shape a good deal of thought which has been floating around rather loosely.”

The idea of a disappearing West suffused the early twentieth century including William Pryor Letchworth’s perceptions.

With the frontier’s supposed closing, nostalgia for the American frontier immediately developed. Americans longed for the unfettered freedom and separation from civilization the frontier offered. Away from society, the American frontier, according to Turner, “forced men to develop individuality and strength to overcome difficult conditions…” Although Turner does not specifically mention women in his thesis, he suggested the frontier’s positive effects on all Americans through their opportunity to grow away from civilization’s restrictions. As participants on the frontier, women, like their male counterparts, were forced to develop the same individuality and strength. In hindsight, frontier women of the past could exude characteristics of the Progressive Era’s ideal American woman, especially individual development. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the leading feminists of the early 1900s, expressed that as women, “…we must depend on ourselves, the dictates of wisdom point to complete

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41 Ibid., 28.
42 Cole, 262-263.
individual development.” American frontiers allowed women to depend on themselves and gave them the opportunity to find their own identity. Progressive Era women found kinship with pioneer women – albeit a manufactured one they developed.

Therefore unsurprisingly, at the turn of the twentieth century, a proliferation of female pioneer monuments appeared. As the ideal American woman changed, these monuments established a precedent suggesting American women were always independent, forthright, and maternal. Instead of the new ideal woman being a Progressive Era development, they suggested they were a continuation and culmination of an established tradition. Monuments were erected that illustrated the independence women found in the West such as Frederick MacMonnies Pioneer Fountain in Denver, Colorado (Fig 11). Others emphasized the maternal ideal, showing pioneer women as the harbingers of civilization whose presence supposedly tamed the West as seen in Charles Grafly’s Pioneer Mother in San Francisco (Fig. 12) and Alexander Phimister Proctor’s monument of the same name in Kansas City, Missouri (Fig. 13). It was through these female American traits of independence and maternity that early twentieth century women believed the American West was elevated. Similarly, progressive women saw it was their feminine duty to uplift society like they believed their pioneer sisters did before them. They, therefore, celebrated their supposed heritage by commissioning monuments that honored the independent and maternal aspects of pioneer women. Letchworth counted Mary Jemison among these pioneer women, believing she shared similar character traits. Likewise, she also shared life experience having lived on the frontier, albeit the early American frontier instead of the Western wilderness. In this way, the Mary Jemison Monument has much in common with contemporary monuments to pioneer women.

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Frederick MacMonnies’, *Pioneer Fountain* located in Denver’s Civic Center is one such depiction of an independent pioneer woman. Erected in 1911, the fountain was meant to beautify the city and celebrate the men and women who “tamed” the West. Along its base is featured a non-specific pioneer woman. Her image exemplifies female independence as she cradles a babe in one arm and a rifle in the other, implying her ability to protect her small family. Lacking an immediate male presence, she independently relies on herself for her and her family’s survival. Similarly, the *Mary Jemison Monument* also fits the era’s interest in frontier women as an independent, capable figure. Like pioneer women, Jemison was able to become a stronger, more independent woman in comparison to the typical white woman of the eighteenth century as she survived in the wilderness. Living among a supposedly primitive group like the Seneca, Jemison was distanced from white civilization – much like the pioneer women of the nineteenth century. Jemison appears as a lone figure, similar to the *Pioneer Fountain*, when, according to her account, she arrived in the Genesee River Valley with her two brothers-in-law and several pack horses. Without their presence, Jemison appears to support herself and her son who is strapped into a cradleboard on her back. She must rely on herself and her abilities, all the while enduring a six-hundred-mile journey while carrying her possessions and a small child. Both the *Pioneer Fountain* and *Mary Jemison Monument* portray children as motivation for women to develop strength and independence to survive illustrating maternity as a large component to the ideal American woman.45

While independent, the ideal woman was also moral, religious, and nurturing due to her inherent female instinct. As such, she was socially obligated to help elevate mankind by ministering to the less fortunate. The Progressive Era’s ideal woman exhibited a “mother-heart” by joining social reform movements to help care for all people, especially children. Progressive women also inlaid the ideal woman’s maternal qualities in pioneer monuments such as San Francisco’s Pioneer Mother and Proctor’s Pioneer Mother. Virtual contemporaries with the Mary Jemison Monument, all three sculptures emphasize motherhood as part of female identity and the notion of the frontier. The San Francisco monument celebrates “taming” the West through motherhood as the pioneer mother who instilled white middle-class values in her children presents them to the world so they can go forth, fulfill their social roles, and create a better society. By introducing Anglo-American culture to the West, frontier women elevated the frontier through motherhood. Meanwhile the Mary Jemison Monument is also meant to uplift society by inspiring its viewers. Likewise, the ideal woman aspired to elevate mankind through motherhood and social programs.

The amelioration of society through motherhood was a familiar theme to Henry Kirke Bush-Brown. Prior to the Mary Jemison Monument, he had depicted motherhood and its importance to female identity in Maternity, sculpted for the New York City Hall of Records in 1902 (Fig. 14). His allegorical conception of motherhood shares much in common with his later Mary Jemison Monument. His Jemison bears a striking resemblance to Maternity with similarly sculpted brow, jaw, and nose lines along with high cheekbones. Their similarities

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47 Patterson, 9. See also Boris, “Reconstructing the ‘Family’: Women, Progressive Reform, and the Problem of Social Control.”
48 Now the Surrogate’s Courthouse in Manhattan.
might suggest an allegorical aspect to the Mary Jemison Monument, turning her into an allegorical figure of the ideal American. Despite gathering scattered accounts of her physical appearance and modelling the sculpture on a woman of Scotch-Irish descent, the monument may also be seen as an idealized representation with strong allusions to the ideal female. Both monuments create an ideal feminine physique implying an ideal female character whose maternal nature was a major aspect of her identity. The monument presents Jemison as the ideal woman of the Progressive Era as she exhibits a strong spirit through her forward movement and the attitude of a caring mother as she sacrifices for her son by embarking on a journey to a better situation – a sacrifice made by many pioneer women.

The same self-sacrifice is seen in Proctor’s Pioneer Mother in Kansas City, Missouri. The horses’ heads hang low from their exhaustive trek while the weary, uncomfortable mother rides along. Despite her fatigue, she looks hopefully ahead at the bright future for her family on the frontier. She sacrifices her comfort for her family’s benefit. Likewise, Bush-Brown’s Jemison took a long, tiring journey to be reunited with her family and provide a better living situation for her son. To better convey Jemison’s independent spirit, Bush-Brown depicted her in mid-step, creating an active presence in comparison to the more passive standing stance Letchworth had initially conceived. She, like Proctor’s Pioneer Mother monument, shows determination as they push into the future.

The difference between a standing and moving pose is clearly seen through comparison to a later Mary Jemison monument erected near her original home in Pennsylvania (Fig. 15). Created by an unknown artist to mark the area near Jemison’s capture, the stone monument was

50 Seaver, 62.
created approximately a decade after the monument on Letchworth’s estate. The Pennsylvania Jemison appears submissive, even timid as she demurely refuses to meet the audience’s gaze and poses defensively with a hand clenched across her breast. Her face does not express any clear emotion, especially not the determination or thought of Bush-Brown’s sculpture. Lacking emotional depth, the Pennsylvania Jemison does not exude the same power of character as the Bush-Brown monument which is endowed with personal strength and determination as she confidently strides forward. Smaller than life-size, the Pennsylvania Jemison is diminutive in comparison to the Bush-Brown sculpture and accepts the audience’s gaze as she glances away, taking no control over her space. Alternatively, Bush-Brown’s Jemison glances down at the viewer, acknowledging her audience’s presence by meeting their gaze and creating a personal connection through eye contact (Fig. 16). She, like the ideal woman, takes command of her space and does not shamefully or demurely accept the audience’s gaze. Instead, she returns it, seemingly illustrating the female ideal of independence and self-assertion.

The *Mary Jemison Monument*’s stance, expression, and composition, seen in connection with contemporary examples, aligns her with the ideal early-twentieth-century woman. She stands independently and strongly commanding her space. It was her distance from civilization, however, that gave her the opportunity to develop these traits. Jemison, like concurrent monuments to female pioneers, shows the wilderness’ effect on women. Although independent, these ideal women were also maternal, showing concern for others and their children. As mothers they were willing to sacrifice to garner a better life for their children. The values the monuments were endowed with were of particular importance to twentieth century progressive reformers who wished to have them publically displayed to better instill them in the lower-classes – particularly immigrants.
Americanizing the Immigrant

In the early 1900s America was perceived as a nation in flux. Immigration patterns shifted in the United States from Northern Europeans to “new immigrants” from Southern Europe and Russia. Their growing numbers were deeply concerning to nativist Americans. They believed that the new immigrants possessed vastly different natal cultures which made it difficult for the new arrivals to assimilate to American life. Their differences supposedly led to societal problems. Attempting to avoid these problems, the immigration issue split into two main ideologies: restriction and anti-restriction. Restrictionists, like Theodore Roosevelt, lobbied for immigration quotas whereas anti-restrictionists, such as Hull House founder Jane Addams, worked for social reforms in order to better assimilate newly arrived immigrants. White middle-class reformers who supported assimilation, like Addams and Lillian Wald, wished to mold immigrants into their own self-image; instilling in them American middle-class values including determination, strength, and independence which they should adopt to become fully assimilated. To these reformers, a successful immigrant was one who accepted such values and fully assimilated into American culture, ultimately becoming good Americans. In this process monuments and public art became tools for instruction by exemplifying the values immigrants were meant to adopt.

51 Between 1880 and 1920, five million Italian immigrants entered the United States. Around the same time, two million Jews sought refuge in the United States as they fled the Russian Progroms. Approximately sixteen million immigrants received green cards between 1880 and 1910.
53 Ibid.
55 Ibid., 165. Addams and Wald established settlement houses in Chicago intended to teach newly arrived immigrants on proper American behaviors and values.
56 Brown, Literature of Immigration, 17.
At this time nativists feared the cultural influence of the growing lower class making their belief that immigrants had to be Americanized grow stronger.\textsuperscript{57} As such, nativists and progressive reformers sought the most effective ways to disseminate assimilationist messages to the widest audience. Local public schools acted as one method of Americanization as immigrant children assimilated as they learned in English and, in turn, helped their families assimilate.\textsuperscript{58} Additionally, the City Beautiful movement, inspired by the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893, contributed to immigrant education by evoking Progressive Era ideals of good citizenship and self-improvement through public art.\textsuperscript{59} These primarily consisted of city planning and public parks with monuments celebrating historic American heroes. The traits the monuments exhibited were meant to be instructive to new immigrants and the lower classes. The communicative power of images was noticed by progressive artist, Edwin Howland Blashfield who recognized the accessibility of art over letters to an illiterate public explaining, “…few can grasp an idea, but that a visible, tangible image is easily understood.”\textsuperscript{60} No matter which language an immigrant spoke, he or she could understand the message conveyed through art. The American parks and public monuments of the City Beautiful movement played an integral part in progressives’ Americanization efforts.\textsuperscript{61} In particular, it was believed carefully planned city parks could have an ameliorative effect on human behavior as man communed with nature in these open spaces.\textsuperscript{62} Jacob Riis, the chronicler of immigrant life in the slums, believed nature helped immigrant children “rebel against the traditional values of their parents,” thus

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\textsuperscript{57} Doss, 27.
\textsuperscript{58} Brown, \textit{Literature of Immigration}, 37.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Blashfield, 6.
\textsuperscript{61} Rimby, 111.
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helping them assimilate to American culture. Similarly, William Pryor Letchworth saw his estate as a means to help men, women, and children access nature.

In 1859, Letchworth purchased what would become Letchworth State Park. At that time, he used his private funds to revitalize the land after it had been decimated by lumber mills and dams along the Genesee River. From the beginning, Letchworth imagined his estate as a retreat for underprivileged children from the nearby industrial centers of Buffalo and Rochester. Beginning in 1902, he built, what he named, Prospect Home on his property where impoverished orphan children could spend three days in the park during the summer being rejuvenated and uplifted by nature. These underprivileged children were likely either immigrants themselves or born to immigrant parents. Their short stay in the park imitated other contemporary reform movements like playground movements and tuberculosis sanatoriums to aid those who could not afford such luxuries. These retreats were meant to help elevate thoughts and relieve the pressure of living in a bustling city, thereby encouraging civil behavior instead of the rambunctious and disorderly behavior immigrants were believed to display.

Letchworth’s plans of building a permanent refuge for children were frustrated, however, when an electric company tried to dam the Genesee River. He could only preserve the area’s natural beauty by turning his land into a public park which ended the children’s summer program. In 1907, the land was donated to New York State, creating Letchworth State Park with the caveat that Letchworth be allowed to live in the park for the remainder of his life and

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63 Quoted in Rimby, 111.
64 Larned, 45.
65 Letchworth’s acquisition and its revitalization can be found in Larned’s Letchworth biography on pages 42-48;
66 Larned, 369.
67 Ibid., 371.
68 Rimby, 75-79.
69 Larned, 383.
make improvements.70 Continuing conservation projects and commissioning the *Mary Jemison Monument*, his donation was an expression of City Beautiful ideology as he provided land to help uplift the general public. Although it may not have been a refuge specifically for orphans as he originally planned, the park provided a natural ameliorative environment for anyone who wished to visit. Following the pattern of other City Beautiful projects, like the Colorado Civic Center, Letchworth added historic monuments to his property, including the Seneca Council House, a cabin once belonging to Mary Jemison’s daughter, Nancy, and the *Mary Jemison Monument*, turning the park into an educational experience on American history, as well as a respite for the lower classes.71 Although it is unknown how many immigrants from the adjacent cities visited the park, it was intended as a refuge from urbanization and to elevate visitors through nature and art.

The public monuments installed on the grounds were meant to be instructive and uplift visitors. Letchworth hoped that the monument would create a public heroine who could instill American white middle-class values in immigrants similar to other historic personages.72 The importance of these monuments was to project virtuous citizenship and true American identity. The *Mary Jemison Monument* taught acceptable character traits as it evinced the values of independence, strength, and determination. Fixed atop a marble pedestal, the sculpture is slightly larger than life-size, making the figure of Mary Jemison tower over her viewers. The monument’s size had a particular purpose as indicated by a letter from Bush-Brown to

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70 Although the land had officially become a state park in 1907, Letchworth was allowed to continue living on and making improvements to the land until his death in 1910.
71 Trying to preserve Mary Jemison’s history, Letchworth also relocated the cabin, which he placed adjacent to the Seneca Council House, in 1881.
72 Heroes from American history like George Washington were particularly useful subjects as Jewish immigrant Mary Antin recounts her own experience in *The Promised Land* (1912). As Antin assimilated to American culture she was taught to idolize monuments of white heroes representing the ideal American so she could absorb middle-class values as described in *Literature of Immigration*, 38.
Letchworth stating he would create a figure no less than six feet in order to support the purpose and the spirit of the design.\textsuperscript{73} The sculpture’s and her presumed character’s greatness is reinforced by the monument’s size as Mary Jemison literally becomes something to look up to and revere because of her extraordinary personal traits.

The \textit{Mary Jemison Monument} would have been especially inspiring to children and immigrants as a representation of an underprivileged character superseding her circumstances. The statue’s audience could, in the words of June Namais, “…identify with a heroic figure who was small and appeared weak yet who accomplished much, both in dealing with others and in summoning her own strength.”\textsuperscript{74} The image relates how Jemison overcame her ordeal by summoning her strength, instructing immigrants on the values of endurance and determination.

Similar to immigrants, Mary Jemison could relate to their experience having travelled hundreds of miles through trying circumstances to secure a better opportunity. Jemison complained about her journey’s hardships stating, “Those only who have travelled on foot the distance of five or six hundred miles, through almost pathless wilderness, can form an idea of the fatigue and sufferings that I endured on that journey. … Such was the fatigue that I sometimes felt, that I thought it impossible for me to go through, and I would almost abandon the idea of even trying to proceed.”\textsuperscript{75} Despite her arduous journey she experienced, Jemison is not represented as overly weary in the monument. Her burdens do not appear particularly heavy as she carries both the bundle and the cradleboard with ease, maintaining a tall, upright posture. She does not let her circumstances limit her. Bush-Brown creates a strong character willing to

\textsuperscript{73} Henry Kirke Bush-Brown, William Pryor Letchworth, February 1, 1909.
\textsuperscript{74} Namias, 178.
\textsuperscript{75} Seaver, 62.
endure – a characteristic he wanted to instill in immigrants so they could become more American.

In some ways the monument’s determined attitude contrasts with Letchworth’s desire to tell the whole of her “sad story” through the sculpture’s “care-worn” expression. Letchworth, though, believed she was, “physically strong and capable of enduring great hardships…,” which Bush-Brown portrays in her visage. Although somber, no aspect of her figure appears overly concerned (Fig. 17). She does not seem to lament her past or begrudge her present. Perhaps the shrug of her shoulders as she adjusts the cradleboard illustrates a slight weariness, but otherwise she appears determined and thoughtful rather than “care-worn.” She appears more contemplative than distraught as she gazes down at the viewer with her furrowed brow. She becomes an ideal American, exemplifying American values of independence, endurance, and strength which were meant to be emulated by the sculpture’s audience with an emphasis towards immigrants.

Fulfilling progressivist goals, the monument becomes an instructive tool on American identity. Like immigrants to the United States, Jemison was taken from her birth society and asked to adapt to a new culture. Her American identity, as understood by Letchworth and Bush-Brown, was based on mixed backgrounds assimilating a new culture. As those from different ethnic backgrounds accepted values of strength, independence, and fortitude, they could become fully American. Similar to Mary Jemison, immigrants could persevere and achieve success in the New World.

76 William Pryor Letchworth, Statue Committee, November 9, 1909.
77 Ibid.
Assimilating the Native American

Like immigrants, Native Americans were also considered outside of American culture. According to progressives in the United States, not only did the massive wave of immigrants need to be assimilated, but Native Americans too. Throughout the nineteenth century, the United States government passed various laws, such as the Dawes Act (1887), encouraging Native Americans to adopt modern farming practices and cease performing traditional dances and ceremonies. Children were often removed from their homes to attend boarding schools where they would be taught how to reside in American culture by accepting standard American values including Western gender roles and attributes. The assimilation of immigrants was fundamentally similar as both immigrant and Native American children attended schools where they were taught in English and encouraged to behave in accordance with Anglo-American culture, meanwhile disregarding their cultural traditions. Perceived as “other”, both groups were separated from white Americans geographically, with Native Americans on reservations and immigrants in ethnic boroughs within cities. For each group, the Mary Jemison Monument was meant to help encourage their integration into white society.

As early as the 1800s, the Seneca started appropriating European customs as large numbers of whites pushed past the Appalachian Mountains following the Seneca’s removal to reservations in western New York near Niagara Falls. Starting in 1797 with the signing of the Treaty of Big Tree, the Seneca were moved to ten different reservations in New York.78 By the early 1900s, the vast majority of Seneca were fairly assimilated as they farmed and lived in log cabins. On their reservations, however, ritual dances and ceremonies were still performed. The

78 The Treaty of Buffalo Creek was signed in 1838 wherein the Seneca agreed to move to Wisconsin or Indian Territory, however, most refused to go and remained in New York. By 1910 there was a stable Seneca population which was fairly assimilated.
remnants of Seneca culture that remained separated them from mainstream white culture. The Seneca, then, needed to wholly assimilate and become fully American.

Jemison’s assimilation illustrates the possibility of assuming a new culture. She was not born a Seneca, but learned to become one and then became acculturated. She demonstrated that, if a person is born in one culture, another could be absorbed and learned. Coming from Seneca culture, she exemplified the possibility of accepting white middle-class values. She becomes, then, an example of assimilation to twentieth-century Seneca. Meanwhile her adoption of Seneca culture made her sympathetic to the Native American’s plight as their culture changed and new value systems were learned. Additionally, she respected the Seneca.

Throughout her narrative Jemison praises the Seneca’s good qualities stating, despite their “cruelties” in war, “they were naturally kind, tender and peaceable towards their friends, and strictly honest; and that those cruelties have been practised, only upon their enemies, according to their idea of justice.”79 Of her Native friends and adopted family she said, “…I was warmly attached in consideration of the favors, affection and friendship with which they had uniformly treated me, from the time of my adoption.”80 In her experience, the Seneca were an inherently good people who held high moral values, perhaps more so than whites. To progressives like Letchworth, Native Americans were generally good people, but in order to advance indigenous society, they needed to accept white values. Jemison’s transition into Seneca culture mirrored their own possible transformation into mainstream white society if they chose to assimilate, finding the American value system to also be good and moral.

Although Jemison had assumed Seneca culture, Letchworth believed that she had retained some white cultural values which, in turn, helped civilize the Seneca. In a letter to the

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79 Seaver, 57.
80 Ibid., 55.
monument committee, Letchworth wrote, “…she was a woman of sensitive nature and of more than ordinary ability, as shown by the great moral influence she exerted over the Indians.”\(^8^1\)

Simply by virtue of being white, Jemison supposedly retained an elevated character which she then used to influence her tribe. Jemison, however, believed white civilization corrupted the Seneca stating, “The use of ardent spirits amongst the Indians, and the attempts to which have been made to civilize and Christianize them by the white people, has constantly made them worse and worse; increased their vices, and robbed them of many of their virtues…” making her moral influence based on white cultural values doubtful.\(^8^2\) As a progressive, though, Letchworth perceived her as a “moral influence” especially in their shared antipathy towards alcohol. Letchworth personally practiced abstinence from drink and Jemison, whose three sons were murdered in drunken brawls, decries the evils of alcohol in her narrative.\(^8^3\) Letchworth possibly designed the monument to exert a moral influence because he saw Jemison as an early reformer whose distain for ardent spirits was similar to Progressive Era temperance movements.

Believing she civilized the Seneca during her lifetime, Letchworth believed that Mary Jemison could continue to civilize those around her through her monument. In this case, she could elevate the Seneca by encouraging assimilation. The *Mary Jemison Monument* instructs its viewers on independence, strength, and determination, illustrating that, although she was from a Native American culture, Jemison could still hold and exemplify the white middle-class values. The monument displays Letchworth’s desired future for the Seneca where they would fully accept these values and instill them in their children, promising the success of following generations in white culture because they shared cultural values.

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\(^8^1\) William Pryor Letchworth, Statue Committee, November 9, 1909.
\(^8^2\) Seaver, 56.
\(^8^3\) Larned, 431-433; Seaver, 56, 111, 150-151.
The amalgamation of cultures is seen in the toddler, Thomas Jemison, carried in the cradleboard on Jemison’s back (Fig. 18). As the son of a white woman and a Delaware man, he is a point of contact between cultures. He becomes a symbol of the distinct amalgamation of cultures found in the United States which separates the country from its European heritage. Fredrick Jackson Turner observed that after absorbing Native American practices to survive in the wilderness, white men changed the wilderness and combined their European heritage with their new Native American practices creating “a new product that is American.” Thomas, then, is a product of the transformed America. He is a visual presentation of intermingling cultures which predominantly held white values, but retained aspects of the old, thus creating a new identity. As both ethnically Native American and white, he represents the possibility of being biologically Native American, but holding the white middle-class values admired by Letchworth. He is, then, a combination of a Seneca bloodline and white culture.

Thomas demonstrated his acceptance of white culture since he grew up to be an assimilated Seneca man. He became a farmer and condemned his brother for practicing polygamy, which was still acceptable in Seneca culture. He saw it as, “a violation of good and wholesome rules in society” and “beneath the dignity, and inconsistent with the principles of good Indians; indecent and unbecoming a gentleman…” Although he did not look European and did not have the same upbringing as a typical white American at the time, he did adopt their same values and lifestyle. Upholding these values, Thomas conformed to Anglo-American culture which reinforced the superiority of Anglo-American values displayed in his mother’s monument.

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84 Turner, 29.
85 Dippie, 16; also Homi K. Bhabha, “How Newness Enters Culture.”
86 Seaver, 106.
87 Ibid.
By accepting white middle-class values, Thomas could also illustrate the future of the Seneca nation. Eventually, the Seneca’s traditional culture would be absorbed into mainstream American culture as assimilation took place. At the end of the nineteenth century, Native Americans no longer posed a threat to white society as the frontier closed, the Indian Wars (1840-1890) concluded, and the Dawes Act was enacted. In early twentieth-century art and literature, they began being portrayed as the defeated and dying Vanishing American. James Earle Fraser’s *The End of the Trail* completed in 1915 (Fig. 19) and Alexander Weinman’s *Destiny of the Red Man* (Fig. 20) each depict what was assumed to be the Native American’s inevitable end. Native American subjects appear dejected and defeated. These examples, near contemporaries with the *Mary Jemison Monument*, illustrate a clear understanding that a culture was disappearing, never to return. In contrast, in her monument, Jemison is not defeated. Rather she marches forward indicating the future assimilation of the Seneca nation. Furthermore, her son Thomas not only represented the continuation of Seneca ethnicity, but its future assimilation of white values. To Letchworth and Bush-Brown, the traditional culture may disappear, but Native Americans could become fully American, despite their ethnicity.

Recognizing assimilation as the Seneca’s future, Letchworth’s *Mary Jemison Monument* also becomes a memorial to traditional Native American culture as, he believed, it disappeared. In an effort to conserve the past, philanthropists, like Letchworth, and those interested in preserving the archeological record, hurried to collect indigenous artifacts before these cultures, as they believed, were lost. Wanting to preserve these artifacts, Letchworth commissioned Bush-Brown to model the cradleboard, dress, and water ladle hanging from Jemison’s belt on existing objects. Bush-Brown had a reputation for rendering historically accurate objects which he utilized as he designed and created the *Mary Jemison Monument*. The realistic details he
employed attempted to portray the disappearing Seneca in, what he perceived as, an authentic manner.

The realism of the *Mary Jemison Monument* was largely important to Letchworth since he wanted the sculpture to appear as authentic as possible. Bush-Brown often wrote to Letchworth about his multiple trips to various natural history museums to study and sketch Seneca artifacts, which became various details on the monument.\(^{88}\) Especially controversial was the cradleboard Jemison carries, as neither Bush-Brown nor Letchworth were aware how Seneca women carried their children. The two debated whether they were carried in blankets attached to their mother’s foreheads or in cradleboards connected by a burden strap wrapped around the shoulders (Fig. 21).\(^{89}\) Only after Professor Putnam from the National Museum in Washington D.C. confirmed Seneca women carried their children in cradleboards, were the two satisfied and went on to insure the burden strap’s authenticity through its resemblance to the actual object.\(^{90}\) Oddly, Bush-Brown and Letchworth never approached the Seneca to answer their question. Instead, they preferred to rely on a professed expert for a scholarly endorsement.

As the significant indicator of Jemison’s Native American association, her costume was another emphasized point of authenticity (Fig. 22). When Charles Dow, a member of the monument committee, suggested they incorporate Southwestern elements because he liked the aesthetics, he was turned down by Letchworth and Bush-Brown because it was inauthentic.\(^{91}\) Letchworth explained to Hall that there is a difference between the Western and Eastern Native Americans manner of dress and the outfit the *Mary Jemison Monument* wears was made by

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88 Letters that reference Henry Kirke Bush-Brown’s research include those dated from Bush-Brown to Letchworth on November 30, 1907, January 2, 1908, and February 25, 1908.
89 William Pryor Letchworth, Edward Hagaman Hall, July 23, 1907.
James Shongo, a descendent of Mary Jemison. Instead of collapsing all Native American tribes into a singular buckskin-wearing stereotype, artist and commissioner carefully studied the Seneca culture in order to accurately portray it. Bush-Brown also included Mary Jemison’s Seneca name, Deh-Ge-Wa-Nus, on the base instead of her birth name. He identifies her with her Seneca culture over her white ethnicity, thereby reinforcing the monument’s authenticity. In emphasizing the realism and authenticity of the monument through objects, Bush-Brown and Letchworth believed their conception of Jemison was accurate. Instead of considering the piece as an artist’s conception of Jemison, it becomes the historical representation. According to artist and commissioner, she was the steadfast woman they represented who displayed admirable American values.

The monument’s authenticity was strengthened by contemporary archeologist, Arthur C. Parker, who endorsed the monument. In a later edition of the narrative following the sculpture’s construction he stated, “This is one of the most accurate, if not the most accurate, studies of New York ethnology that I have ever seen. It is not only a monument to the heroic captive, but a fitting memorial, and an accurate one, to the nation which adopted her.” Although he was the New York State Museum’s Chief of the Archeological Department, his most important credential was his Seneca heritage. Being Seneca, he was an educated indigenous voice who could authenticate the details of the monument. Meanwhile, he was also a strong proponent for assimilation, believing it would help elevate his tribe. His own assimilation had provided him with educational opportunities otherwise unavailable if he remained on the reservation practicing

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92 William Pryor Letchworth, Edward Hagaman Hall, April 25, 1908.
94 Ibid.
traditional Seneca culture. In praising the monument, he praises Jemison’s – and his own – ability to adapt to a new culture and encourages his nation to do the same. He helps hold her up as a role model to all who view her, desiring they emulate her character. In doing so he confirmed the perception that the Seneca were dying and their future relied on assimilating white middle-class values.

As a role model to the Seneca, Jemison illustrated the possibility of successfully adopting a new culture. Concurrently, she exemplified strength, endurance, and independence as accepted American values which the Seneca should appropriate as they joined white culture. Her blend of cultures, along with her son’s Native American heritage, and his conformity to white middle-class values, exhibited the possibility of adopting cultural values despite ethnicity. According to the monument, American identity did not rely on a particular racial background, but on the acceptance of the American values Jemison represents.

Conclusion

In the early twentieth century America was in the midst of an identity crisis. The country struggled internally as vast numbers of immigrants arrived daily and it was still unclear how to handle the remaining Native American population. The established American culture was besieged with alternative ideologies and cultural traditions. White, middle-class Americans felt threatened by the progression of the modern world and wished to reaffirm their way of life. One method of dealing with these anxieties and creating a new American identity was found through public art and monuments.

The *Mary Jemison Monument* commissioned by William Pryor Letchworth and sculpted by Henry Kirke Bush-Brown exhibits their conception of an American identity which coincided with the progressive social reform in an attempt to ease anxieties and promote American-ness.
Throughout the sculpture’s composition, Mary Jemison becomes a figure emanating American values such as independence, strength, and perseverance. Although supposedly weary from her exhaustive journey from Ohio to the Genesee River Valley, she does not appear overly fatigued and instead appears to nonchalantly adjust the cradleboard’s burden strap displaying her physical strength. Her moral strength is also illustrated in her resolute, contemplative expression. To suit William Pryor Letchworth’s needs, he created a striking figure who takes an active role as she boldly strides forward despite the burdens placed upon her. Depicted as a lone figure, she works independently for her and her child’s survival. A victim of captivity, she has adjusted to her circumstances and continues determined despite her supposed disadvantages. Finally, her endurance is seen in her willingness to continue forward despite mental and physical obstacles. She exhibits, then, a multitude of cherished American values.

These same values were displayed by the ideal woman of the Progressive Era. These women practiced the American ideals which permeated the Mary Jemison Monument exhibiting an independent mind and maternal heart. The attributes of the ideal woman were retroactively placed on historical frontier women identifying them with individuality, strength of character, and a devotion to motherhood. These women were responsible for raising the successive generations of Americans, and humanity at large, by instilling American values in them which would help them reach success. As these monumental women were supposed to instruct their own children, they also served as teachers to the public as exemplars of American values.

Following City Beautiful movement ideals of elevating humanity through city planning and public art, Letchworth State Park was intended by its donor as an escape from the city to the rejuvenating and ameliorative effects of nature to help improve human behavior. In accordance with these beliefs on nature, public monuments were also installed in parks to better help educate
the public, particularly the lower classes on virtuous character. These lower classes generally consisted of immigrants and the public monuments illustrated great American characters from an American past in order to instill American values, thereby Americanizing the Other.

Her instructive qualities also taught the public and Seneca about the disappearing Native American tribes. The monument’s authenticity attempts to preserve Seneca artifacts in an anthropological manner, however it also instructs that Native Americans can be Americanized as well since Mary Jemison was partially seen as a civilizing influence. However, her mixed identity illustrates the progression of civilization where two cultures that come in contact create a third space wherein a new identity may be formed. The cultural encounters between Native Americans, Anglo-Americans, and European immigrants all merged together to form a unique amalgamation of cultures which was the true success of American identity. In the Progressive Era, origins were not as important as shared values. All races could be American, just as Mary Jemison illustrates as she appears Seneca, but displays culturally accepted American values. These values made up the American identity which is a mixture of backgrounds and cultures which all came to share similar values of independence, strength, and perseverance. It was through these personal characteristics that the American dream could be achieved.

Native American captive images, although typically dismissed today as violent images of Native Americans, can elucidate the reception of these narratives. The literature documents these events, but the art surrounding them reveals how societies appropriated these stories and how their reception changed over the centuries. The Mary Jemison Monument in Letchworth State Park is still only one small piece of a much larger cultural puzzle.
Figure 2 John Mix Stanley. *Osage Scalp Dance*. 1845. Smithsonian American Art Museum.
Figure 3 George Caleb Bingham. *Captured by Indians*. 1848. St. Louis Art Museum.
Figure 4 Charles Ferdinand Wimar. *The Abduction of Daniel Boone’s Daughter by the Indians*. 1853. Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum.
Figure 5 Eanger Irving Couse. *The Captive*. 1891. Phoenix Art Museum.
Figure 6 Pierre Charles Canot after Benjamin West. *The Indians Delivering up the English Captives to Colonel Bouquet near his camp at the forks of Muskingum in North America in Novr. 1764. 1766.* Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D.C.
Figure 8 Chauncey Bradley Ives. *The Willing Captive*. 1871. Chrysler Museum of Art.
Figure 10 Charles Dana Gibson. *America, anywhere in the mountains*. 1900. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D.C.
Figure 11 Frederick MacMonnies. *Mother* from *Pioneer Fountain*. 1911. Civic Center, Denver, Colorado.
Figure 12 Charles Grafly. *Pioneer Mother*. 1915. Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, California.
Figure 13 Alexander Phimister Proctor. *Pioneer Mother*. 1925. Santa Barbara Museum of Art.
Figure 15 Unknown. *Mary Jemison Monument*. 1923. Orrtanna, Pennsylvania. Erected by Father Will Whalen.
Figure 16 Henry Kirke Bush-Brown. *Mary Jemison Right* from *Mary Jemison Monument*. (See Fig. 1).
Figure 17 Henry Kirke Bush-Brown. *Mary Jemison Facial Close-Up* from *Mary Jemison Monument*. (See Fig. 1).
Figure 18 Henry Kirke Bush-Brown. *Baby in Cradleboard* from *Mary Jemison Monument*. (See Fig. 5).
Figure 19 James Earle Fraser. *The End of the Trail*. 1915 cast 1918. Birmingham Museum of Art.
Figure 21 Henry Kirke Bush-Brown. *Mary Jemison Back* from *Mary Jemison Monument* (See Fig. 1).
Figure 22 Henry Kirke Bush-Brown. *Mary Jemison Costume* from *Mary Jemison Monument* (See Fig. 1).
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