



Sequoia: The Heralded Tree In American Art and Culture

Lori Vermaas

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In a brilliant, wide-ranging analysis of the cultural meaning of the California sequoias, author Lori Vermaas reveals how Americans have seen nature as an inspiration, a natural resource, and a national treasure. Analyzing a wide range of sources - landscape paintings, stereographs, tourist photographs, advertisements, and art photography - the author traces the transformation in American views of the natural environment from the 19th century to today. The result is an eye-opening history of Americans in the West and their interactions with the land. Americans perceived the wilderness as a vast, open preserve destined to be conquered and controlled, but around the time of the trees' discovery and celebration, Americans were beginning to see the Western landscape (and sequoias) through very different lenses. Some Americans, especially businessmen and railroad companies, endeavored to put the trees to commercial use, seeing them as the source of tremendous profits. Others, like tourists and early environmentalists, fought to preserve them, often because they saw the majestic trees as their nation's natural inheritance. "Sequoia" presents a timely perspective on both the environment and American culture, offering a new understanding of the contentious battles over nature today.

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