

# ESSAY ON AMERICAN SCENERY

Cole wrote about both his appreciation of but also his worry for the American landscape in an essay called *Essay on American Scenery*, published in *American Monthly Magazine* 1 in January 1836. At a time when American natural scenery was commonly thought of as inferior to the beauty of European landscapes, Cole argued that the wilds of America were just as, if not more, beautiful than any other place in the world. Moreover, in the face of mounting industrialization, he pleaded readers to value and preserve its quickly disappearing wilderness.

At the time of his writing, the American landscape was changing rapidly. The advent of railroads, factories, mills, and steamships brought dramatic change to Catskill, New York, where Cole made his home, as well as to much of the Hudson River Valley and later to the United States as a whole. As he observed his beloved town of Catskill and its surrounding environs transformed by industry, Cole wrote, “I cannot but express my sorrow that the beauty of such landscapes is quickly passing away... another generation will behold spots now rife with beauty desecrated by what is called ‘improvement.’”

Today, the American landscape, both physical and cultural, is changing too. Reflect on these changes in your own ‘Essay on American Scenery’. You may respond, as Cole did, to a changing climate or physical landscape, the changing social and political landscape, or, simply, to changes to their hometowns, neighborhood, block, a single building or natural feature.

## **The prompt:**

How is the American landscape changing? How do you feel about it? Is there something you see, do, or experience now that you hope will be around for future generations?

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