

## 30 QUOTATIONS



James Fenimore Cooper

(1789-1851)

James Fenimore Cooper wrote the great epic of American discovery and the westward movement of the frontier in 5 volumes, *The Leatherstocking Saga* (1823-41). His hero became an icon of the American spirit and one of the most popular characters in world literature, modeled on real frontiersmen such as Daniel Boone. Leatherstocking is also called Natty Bumppo, Hawkeye, the Deerslayer, the Pathfinder, and the trapper. The author does not agree with Natty about everything, but makes him a Christ-evoking figure. Cooper was a conservative Democrat in agreement with the Founding Fathers and at war against squatters on his land, new rich urban capitalists and the press in New York.

ORDER OF TOPICS: Nature and God, culture, ideal synthesis, westward movement, conservation, the waste land, Natty Bumppo as mythic figure, Christianity, Indians, race, equality, property, society, newspapers, politics, Democracy, the minority, government:

### NATURE AND GOD

“The whole ‘arth is a temple of the Lord to such as have the right mind.” [Natty Bumppo]

“The garden of the Lord was the forest then, and is the forest now, where the fruits do grow and the birds do sing, according to his own wise ordering.” [Natty Bumppo]

The sublimity connected with vastness is familiar to every eye.

#### CULTURE

A refined simplicity is the characteristic of all high bred deportment, in every country.

#### IDEAL SYNTHESIS

He [Natty Bumppo] is too proud of his origin to sink into the condition of the wild Indian, and too much a man of the woods not to imbibe as much as was at all desirable, from his friends and companions... Removed from nearly all the temptations of civilized life, placed in the best associations of that which is deemed savage, and favorably disposed by nature to improve such advantages, it appeared to the writer that he was a fit subject to represent the better qualities of both conditions.

#### WESTWARD MOVEMENT

The American axe! It has made more real and lasting conquests than the sword of any warlike people that ever lived; but they have been conquests that have left civilization in their train instead of havoc and desolation. More than a million square miles of territory have been opened up from the shades of the virgin forest, to admit the warmth of the sun; and culture and abundance have been spread where the beast of the forest so lately roamed, hunted by the savage.

#### CONSERVATION

The stranger [Natty Bumppo] had been a silent but attentive observer of their progress. As tree after tree came whistling down, he cast his eyes upward, at the vacancies they left in the heavens, with a melancholy gaze, and finally turned away muttering to himself with a bitter smile, like one who disdained giving a more audible utterance to his discontent.

#### THE WASTE LAND

“I often think the Lord has placed this barren belt of prairie behind the States, to warn men to what their folly may yet bring the land!” [Natty Bumppo]

#### NATTY BUMPPPO AS MYTHIC FIGURE

The sun had fallen below the crest of the nearest wave of the prairie... In the centre of the flood of fiery light a human form appeared, drawn against the gilded background as distinctly, and seemingly as palpable, as though it would

come within the grasp of any extended hand. The figure was colossal; the attitude musing and melancholy; and the situation directly in the route of the travelers. [He becomes analogous to Moses and Christ.]

#### CHRISTIANITY

“God made us all, white, black, and red; and, no doubt, had his wise intentions in coloring us differently.... I’ll not deny that he gave each race its gifts. A white man’s gifts are christianized, while a redskin’s are more for the wilderness.” [Natty Bumppo]

Slavery is no more sinful, by the Christian code, than it is sinful to wear a whole coat, while another is in tatters, to eat a better meal than a neighbor, or otherwise enjoy ease and plenty while our fellow creatures are suffering and in want.

#### INDIANS

Few men exhibit greater diversity, or, if we may express it, greater antithesis of character than the native warrior of North America. In war he is daring, boastful, cunning, ruthless, self-denying, and self-devoted. In peace, just, generous, hospitable, revengeful, superstitious, modest, and commonly chaste.

The whites had a common enemy to dread, in the ancient and *perhaps more lawful* occupants of the country. [emphasis added]

#### RACE

Should we distrust the man because his manners are not our manners, and his skin is dark?

#### EQUALITY

We can all perceive the difference between ourselves and our inferiors, but when it comes to a question of the difference between us and our superiors we fail to appreciate merits of which we have no proper conceptions

Equality, in a social sense, may be divided into that of condition, and that of rights. Equality of condition is incompatible with civilization, and is found only to exist in those communities that are but slightly removed from the savage state. In practice it can only mean a common misery.

The very existence of government at all, infers inequality. The citizen who is preferred to office becomes the superior to those who are not, so long as he is the repository of power, and the child inherits the wealth of the parent as a controlling law of society.

## PROPERTY

If we would have civilization and the exertion indispensable to its success, we must have property; if we have property, we must have its rights; if we have the rights of property, we must take those consequences of the rights of property which are inseparable from the rights themselves.

## SOCIETY

[Paul Hover, the bee hunter in *The Prairie*] soon became a landholder, then a prosperous cultivator of the soil, and shortly after a town-officer. By that progressive change in fortunes, which in the republic is often seen to be so singularly accompanied by a corresponding improvement in knowledge and self-respect, he went on, from step to step, until his wife enjoyed the maternal delight of seeing her children placed far beyond the danger of returning to that state from which both their parents had issued. Paul is actually at this moment a member of the lower branch of the legislature of the state where he has long resided... Middleton, who fills, with a credit better suited to the difference in their educations, a seat in a far higher branch of legislative authority, is the source from which we have derived most of the intelligence necessary to compose our legend.

## NEWSPAPERS

If the newspapers are useful in overthrowing tyrants, it is only to establish a tyranny of their own.

The press, like fire, is an excellent servant, but a terrible master.

## POLITICS

Individuality is the aim of political liberty.

The disposition of all power is to abuses.

Principles become modified in practice by facts.

## DEMOCRACY

The tendency of democracies is, in all things, to mediocrity.

Party leads to vicious, corrupt and unprofitable legislation, for the sole purpose of defeating party.

It is a besetting vice of democracies to substitute public opinion for law. This is the usual form in which masses of men exhibit their tyranny.

### THE MINORITY

The minority of a country is never known to agree, except in its efforts to reduce and oppress the majority.

### GOVERNMENT

The agency which can produce most good, when perverted from its proper aim, is most productive of evil.

The affairs of life embrace a multitude of interests, and he who reasons in any one of them, without consulting the rest, is a visionary unsuited to control the business of the world.

