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First off, I'd like to thank the Historians of Eighteenth Century Art and Architecture for hosting this session, and thank Amelia Rauser for organizing and chairing it.

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This painting hangs down the street, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's newly renovated American Wing. It's an unassuming work, about two feet by three feet, depicting five relatively youthful men gathered around a table in a small room. We know the identities of two of the men in the scene, and we presume to know which one is which. The man seated on the right in front of a canvas is generally accepted to be the artist, Matthew Pratt, and the standing figure in green is identified as Pratt's mentor and cousin-in-law Benjamin West. Pratt's painting was exhibited in 1765 as *The American School*, the title we still know it by today. Two things are revolutionary about this work, for my purposes. The first is that, in 1765, there was even the concept of an "American School" of art. The second is the location of that school, in London, based around the workshop of Benjamin West.

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That London was the center of the American painting tradition under West for the better part of six decades is remarkable, and yet there is a great deal of work to be done exploring his pedagogy and philosophy of teaching. Over the course of fifty-seven years, at least twenty-five artists who were born or raisedⁱ in America made the transatlantic voyage to study under West in London, Pratt being the first. Comparatively, we have record of only a small number of British artists working with West over the same six decades,ⁱⁱ suggesting that the artist took a pointed interest in training American students. An overwhelming majority of these students intended on

returning to North America to continue their painting practice, and most did to some measure of success. Several students, notably Gilbert Stuart, John Trumbull, and Charles Robert Leslie, were counted among the leading artists in England during their time in that nation.

We know the identities of most of West's students, the time frames they spent under his guidance, and many of the works they completed in London. For most students we know why they traveled to London, because West was generally considered the greatest American painter of his day. He was certainly the most highly decorated. West was a Founding Member of the Royal Academy of Arts, served as the Historical Painter to King George III, and was President of the Royal Academy from 1792 to 1805 and again from 1806 until his death in 1820. All of those accolades, as well as his reputation for optimism, altruism, and accessibility, explain *why* artists would seek out West for training, but they do not explain why West would make himself accessible to so many students who had to travel across the Atlantic to get to him, in some cases even lodge in his home. It also does not explain the relative exclusion of non-American artists from West's teaching circle.

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I argue that Benjamin West encouraged the education of so many American students because of a desire to enhance his own reputation and write himself a larger entry in the annals of art's history, rather than a desire to progress the arts in any one nation. Many of his actions throughout the course of his life were directed toward establishing a place as the protagonist in the foundation stories of both the American and English schools of art. The best-known example of this is the 1816 biography by John Galt,ⁱⁱⁱ for which West provided most of the content and which makes the artist out to be an autodidact who learned how to make pigments from Native

Americans, plucked his own cat's tail to construct a paintbrush, and somehow found the time to become the most talented ice skater in America, all before the age of 22.

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I also suggest that we must look at West's striving for greatness through the prism of his family, especially as the concept was understood in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Most obvious is in the names of his two sons, Raphael and Benjamin, Jr. Both boys were named after the greatest painter in history: their father. The connection for the younger Benjamin, Jr. is obvious, while for Raphael it's important to remember that his father was given the nickname "the American Raphael" while still studying in Italy in his early twenties. However, West experienced the notion of family in a different sense than you or I. The position of fathers changed drastically in the middle of the eighteenth century, to become more attentive and involved in the lives of their children, and structures of family became increasingly flexible.^{iv} West adopted his students in multiple senses of the word, bringing them into his workshop and household, and, by extension, his family. This placed a demand on the master artist, and it also allowed him to utilize the familial organization of his studio to locate himself at the genesis of both the American and English artistic traditions.

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In order to consider the way Benjamin West's workshop practice played a role in his attempts to establish his legacy and dictate the course of American painting, we first have to consider the workshop itself and its organization. At the time West was operating in London, aspiring artists largely had to seek out other established artists for artistic training. Informal drawing lessons were available through institutions such as William Hogarth's St. Martin's Lane

Academy and later the Royal Academy, but that was the extent of the opportunities those organizations provided. Students in West's studio received hands-on instruction on how to prepare their materials, advice on creating their own compositions, and painted side-by-side with the master. More advanced students served as studio assistants and contributed directly to West's canvases,^v such as when John Trumbull made alterations in 1784-85 to West's second version of *The Battle of La Hogue*.

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A traditional way of viewing West's workshop has been chronologically, using the same structure set forth by Dorinda Evans in her 1980 exhibition *Benjamin West and His American Students*. Evans organizes West's students into three generations of approximately twenty years each, and provides a biographical overview of each man's experience in London. I propose an alternative system of organization, based on spheres of training influence on the American artists who traveled to London to study under West. Of the two dozen or so Americans who trained with West, a handful had previously studied with other artists whom had already passed through West's studio, and a number received simultaneous training from both West and his former students who still resided in London. Whereas an organization based on generations looks like this, the system I'm proposing looks more like this visualization.

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Each node in this chart is an artist, and each edge, or line, indicates a teaching relationship. That relationship could be formal or informal, as long as it was hierarchical in nature. My primary source material for the student-teacher relationships was Evans's exhibition catalog.^{vi} This data was logged in a spreadsheet and run through a network visualization

algorithm to create this chart. Nodes with commonalities are drawn to each other, while those without anything in common are pushed apart.

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If we drop out the names for a moment, we can see clearly that the visualization identifies a sizeable cluster of students engaged in extracurricular training with other students who passed through West's workshop, as well as a significant number of students who received no instruction from other members of the studio.^{vii} Today, it's that grouping of interconnected students which draws my interest.

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Running the same algorithm on teaching relationships with Benjamin West removed gives a clearer picture of how those associations developed between his students. There is one cluster of nine students who each engaged in at least one, and up to four, teaching relationships with another contemporary or former member of West's workshop. There is also the father-son pair of Charles Willson and Rembrandt Peale. Within the larger cluster of students we can also identify two artists who form the center of a sub-network of individuals, based on the amount of teaching connections in which they were the instructor. Chronologically, the first of these networks is the one which emerged around Gilbert Stuart.

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Stuart traveled to London in 1775 with the explicit intention of establishing a practice on his own, without West's assistance. He failed, and Stuart approached West in 1777, upon which he was welcomed into the West home as well as workshop. Stuart trained under West for six

years and remained in Europe for another decade before returning to the United States. Before, during, and after his time in London, Stuart offered instruction to a number of artists –Trumbull, Mather Brown, Thomas Sully, and his nephew Gilbert Stuart Newton – who each continued their studies under West.

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Sully and Newton form a bridge to the other major cluster of artists based around Washington Allston, one of West's later students, who trained under West from 1801 to 1803, and then again from 1811 to 1818. During that second stint in London, Allston essentially functioned as the lead instructor for the other pupils under West, who by that point was in his 70s and largely occupied by the Royal Academy, as well as his own attempts to reassert himself as a relevant contemporary history painter. Allston instructed Newton, Samuel F.B. Morse, and Charles Robert Leslie, the latter of whom first received training from Thomas Sully. Leslie gave painting instruction to Newton and received instruction from Charles Bird King, who similarly trained Morse.

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Plotting the names and relationships of West's circle makes for an interesting visual, and it also proves a fruitful launching point for reconsidering the structure of his workshop. The Stuart and Allston clusters do not overlap chronologically. Stuart offered instruction to Brown and Trumbull in the 1770s, and then to Sully and Newton in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Allston's instruction occurred during his second tour in London, when the quintet of Allston, Newton, Leslie, Morse, and King essentially constituted a school of its own.

To better incorporate these substructures into West's career, it would be productive to think of them as families rather than network clusters. The concept of family in the transatlantic world was broad within West's lifetime, beginning with the mid-eighteenth century recognition of childhood as an independent stage of growth between infancy and adulthood.^{viii} Fatherhood changed drastically in this period as well, with fathers expected to show a much higher level of involvement and emotion directed toward their children, especially their sons. This shift in structure was also applicable to the concept of family in general.

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In the eighteenth century, the term "family" was used interchangeably for a number of structures. As described by Naomi Tadmor, the dominant family structure was the household family, a constantly-changing configuration which consisted of a head of household and all of his or her dependents living under one roof, whether related by blood or not.^{ix} There was also the lineage family, which included one's future descendants as well as one's ancestors and extended family. That greater continuum of lineage family is visible in this image celebrating the birth of West's second son, in the presence of his father John and half-brother Thomas. Family also encompassed friendship relationships. For West, it would have been appropriate at various times to describe a student like Gilbert Stuart, who briefly lived in his house, or Charles Willson Peale, with whom he maintained a lifelong correspondence, as members of his family just the same as his wife or sons.

Of these shifting family structures, it's the concept of a lineage family which provides the best insight into West's personal goals for his teaching practice. In Galt's biography the artist is presented as a self-taught prodigy, with the influence of itinerant artists like William Williams –

who taught West in North America – omitted entirely. Similarly, the incident during West's time in Rome when he observed similarities between the Apollo Belvedere torso and the body of a Mohawk Indian was a calculated interaction meant to focus attention on the novelty of his North American upbringing, something he encouraged throughout his life. In essence, West denied participation in any existing artistic lineage family, preferring the public to believe he emerged from the wilderness outside Philadelphia fully formed as an artist.

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That's not to say that West rejected the entire concept of participation in a lineage family, far from it. Through his efforts to train American painters, he positioned himself as the originator and head of the American painting tradition despite living in London. The success of each artist who passed through his studio was reflected back at the master and enhanced his reputation in turn. West's participation in the Royal Academy can be read the same way, as a successful attempt to insinuate himself in the development of a homegrown English school of art. When West assumed the Presidency of the Royal Academy in 1792, he used the metaphor of family and fatherhood to take credit for the successes of the Academy's students even though he did not teach in its schools. In his first *Discourse*, West stated: "I mean not in this to invade the province of those who are selected to conduct the instruction of this Academy...My purpose therefore is not to instruct, but to exhort and advise. In a great family it remains with the parent at all times to counsel those, over whose education others are appointed."^x

Although some of the later artists who passed through his studio, such as King and Newton, barely interacted with West, by that point the president of the Royal Academy was more interested in creating associations than in directly influencing those students' works. The

fact that I'm talking about those students in conjunction with West today is a sign he was successful.

Benjamin West's endeavors as a teacher were focused primarily on establishing his universal historic legacy, rather than an altruistic desire to advance artistic training on national grounds. As societal roles for fathers changed in the middle of the eighteenth century, West recognized an opportunity to utilize the familial structure of the profession of art to position himself as the father of both the English and American schools. Without an awareness of West's preoccupation with his own history, we cannot properly place him within the history of art in either nation he called home.

Thank you.

ⁱ Thomas Sully and Charles Robert Leslie were both born in England, while Gilbert Stuart Newton was born in Canada. All three were raised in America for a significant portion of their youths. The other students, per Dorinda Evans, were: Matthew Pratt, Abraham Delanoy, Charles Willson Peale, Joseph Wright, Gilbert Stuart, Ralph Earl, John Trumbull, Mather Brown, Raphael West, Thomas Spence Duché, William Dunlap, George William West, Robert Fulton, Washington Allston, Rembrandt Peale, Abraham G.D. Tuthill, Edward G. Malbone, Charles Bird King, Samuel Lovett Waldo, and Samuel F.B. Morse.

ⁱⁱ West's known British students include his sons, John Downman, and Richard Livesay.

ⁱⁱⁱ John Galt, *The Life, Studies, and Works of Benjamin West, Esq., President of the Royal Academy of London, Prior to his Arrival in England, Compiled from Materials Furnished by Himself*, London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, Strand, 1816.

^{iv} See Karin Calvert, "Children in American Family Portraiture, 1670-1810," *The William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 87-113.

^v Dorinda Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*. Washington, D.C.: Published for the National Portrait Gallery by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980, p. 22. According to Evans, who cites C.R. Leslie, West would discuss his students' works with them in the morning before beginning his own work.

^{vi} Evans herself relies on William Dunlap's *Diary and History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design*, as well as letters and records related to those painters identified as students.

^{vii} We do know that at least four Americans in West's studio were also students in the Royal Academy schools. Joseph Wright and Mather Brown were the first two American R.A. students ever, and both Washington Allston and Charles Robert Leslie also attended its schools.

^{viii} Calvert, "Children in American Family Portraiture," pp. 101-105.

^{ix} For descriptions of all of the family structures mentioned in this paragraph, see Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, especially chapters 1-5.

^x Full quote: "I mean not in this to invade the province of those who are selected to conduct the instruction of this Academy. The worthy and able professors whom you have nominated, do honor to your choice; and their lectures contribute no less to the dignity of this institution, than to the scientific improvements both in theory and practice which are committed to their charge. My purpose therefore is not to instruct, but to exhort and advise. In a great family it remains with the parent at all times to counsel those, over whose education others are appointed. Under

that figure I embrace the trust conferred upon me here: more closely I cannot feel it.” Benjamin West, *A Discourse, Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy, on the Distribution of Prizes, December 10, 1792, by the President*, London: Thomas Cadell, 1793.