**INTRO:** At about fourteen years of age, Lewis H. Garrard, read John C. Fremont’s *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, an account published in U.S. newspapers in 1843. Fremont’s descriptive account enticed Lewis to venture West by himself only three years later. Garrard wrote his own book of experiences lasting from 1846-1847 titled *Wah-to-yah and the Taos Trail*. “Wah-to-yah” is a Comanche word meaning “double peaks,” which described the mountainous Spanish Peaks found in southeastern Huerfano County, Colorado. As Lewis set off, Ceran St. Vrain, the founding partner of the Bent, St. Vrain, & Company, guided his wagon from Independence, Missouri to the trading operation along the Arkansas River, known as Bent’s Fort, in September of 1846.

**FLAGS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY**

National flags have been used for hundreds of years for many purposes. They are often a symbol of identity and national pride. During wars and conflicts, flags are raised to distinguish friend from foe the same way uniforms are worn to help identify which side a soldier is on. Recall the War of 1812 when Fort McHenry was attacked. Britain’s foot soldiers were called “red coats” and the sign that America was winning the battle at Fort McHenry was seeing the American flag still flying. This event inspired the famous words of the Star-Spangled Banner: “O say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave…?”

When Lewis Garrard visits the interior West in 1846, the United States flag looked roughly the same as it does today with thirteen red and white stripes and stars collected on a blue background. However, since the nation had twenty-eight states at that time, there were twenty-eight stars on the flag instead of the fifty we have today. The area we now know as Colorado was an unorganized territory of the United States at this time. Further, many Native American nations with their own sovereign governments still claimed this region as their homeland. When Garrard travels through the southern plains he observes various national and cultural differences. He notes, “The different Indian tribes have no such distinctions but in articles of dress or marks of the body – using no flag except the white, indicative of peace – a sign, as it would seem, understood by intuition to all the world” (95).

Toward the end of his trip, during the U.S./Mexican War, Lewis Garrard volunteered for military service. When his company was put to flight by a group of Comanche, he recorded that “They rallied and again circled around us, with their white shields protecting their bodies, tossing their spears and showing off their beautiful horses and their own graceful persons to the best advantage” (288). The white shields Lewis reports were likely either a round shield made of buffalo or elk hide or a large breastplate made of small bones or hair pipe linked together. Native Americans on the Plains often wore large and decorative breastplates around their neck.

As you think about America and its dealings with other nations, what conclusions do you come to when considering how flags are used by the military or by a country’s citizens?

*Optional reading:* A little under twenty years later, in 1864, a Cheyenne and Arapaho delegation received assurances from Colorado governor, John Evans, moving to the encampment at Sand Creek would guarantee their safety. With increasing traffic and Anglo settlement in the region, mistrust grew and tensions over movement within the territory increased. The Cheyenne and Arapaho were promised if they raised the American flag in their encampment, no harm would come. Nevertheless, at dawn on November 29th, Colonel John Chivington and his Third Colorado Cavalry opened fire on the unsuspecting tribes. Chief Black Kettle called out for peace and raised both the American flag and white flag of surrender during the advance. The troops ignored him. Two hundred thirty Cheyenne and Arapaho, mostly women, children, and elderly were killed. This event is now known as the Sand Creek Massacre. Among those were friends and relatives of William Bent. William’s children were present at the massacre, but survived the attack.