Hello, welcome to the 13th Annual Joanna Dunlap Cowden Memorial Lecture. Thanks for coming up tonight. My name is Laird Easton, I'm Chair of the History Department. And before I introduce today's speaker, just a few things about the way events will unfold tonight. Our speaker will speak for her allotted time and then there will be a period of questions. And after that we will retire to have a reception in Trinity 100 across the way. So that's how things will go. You can look at your program and see all of the speakers that we have had over the years in the Cowden Memorial Lectureship. And it's a tribute to both Joanna Cowden and to her family and friends that have funded this lectureship. This is I think the most prestigious long-running lectureship at this university. As I said, it's a tribute to Joanna.

I knew Joanna when I first came here as a young faculty member. You can read about her in the program and see that she taught antebellum and Civil War history. She was deeply interested in women's history and American intellectual history as well. But I can just say, personally, that she was a delightful colleague. She was very kind to young freshmen faculty. She was intellectually curious. She had a lot of integrity. I have very fond memories of being in her living room for the history reading group. And I just--I'm so pleased every time I have a chance to introduce the academy lecture to think about how Joanna would have been very touched by--of this memory for her.
And, of course, we owe that to her family who have helped fund the lectureship. And they always come out to attend and so we have her husband, Bob McCulley here. We have her four daughters, Jennifer, Jean, Rebecca, Sandy. We have her sister who flew all the way from Buffalo, New York, Susan Thomas [assumed spelling], we have her niece, Kristine Thomas [assumed spelling] all attending tonight. And so I thank you and I thank all the people who contributed to this lectureship. And so, again, a great tribute to Joanna.

Tonight's speaker, I have the opportunity of introducing because in a way like a scout, I found her 11 years ago at the American Historical Association meeting when I was in the new—when I was in the books exhibit. And I was there with my colleague Steve Lewis, and I'm not sure this is exactly how it happened, but we'll just say it was. I found a book that looked very interesting to me on America's interests in the classical inheritance. And the way I recollect this, I said, "Wow, what a fascinating book," and the author was standing right by and said, "Yes, that is a fascinating book, I wrote it." And that's how I met Caroline Winterer, although it is many years ago. And it was one of those moments when you just feel great to be a historian to encounter someone so interesting. So I'm pretentious and that's what you're interest in work. So, for me, it was a moment of, I don't know, amazement perhaps or even wonder. And I just stored away and things developed, time passed. And then it occurred to me that Caroline would be a wonderful lecture in this series because I know Joanna was very interested in American intellectual history.
So I looked her up and low and behold and to no surprises really she even snatched up by Stanford where she teaches today.

Caroline Winterer is currently the director of the Humanities Center at Stanford, as well as professor of History and a professor of Classics by courtesy at Stanford University. She's published--her first book was on America's interest in classical civilization. The second book was on--called The Mirror of Antiquity about the classical inheritance and American Women. She's published thousands of articles in major journals. And she's engaged, right now in a very fascinating project concerning mapping, what's the name of mapping--mapping in the Republic of Letters particularly in the case of Caroline dealing with the letters in the correspondence of Benjamin Franklin. So, that's her resume, you can read about it in your program. I welcome Caroline Winterer, who will speak tonight on the subject, "Are We Rome or Are We Greece? America's Infatuation with Classical Antiquity."

[ Applause ]
Wonderful, thank you so much, Laird for that wonderful introduction. And thank you to Robert Tinkler for bringing me out here and managing logistics. Thank you also, especially to the Joanna Cowden Memorial Lectureship for this wonderful opportunity to come and speak here. I had the most beautiful drive from I-5 to Chico, my Garmin GPS took me through the beautiful orchards on a lovely fall afternoon and I got to eat with the family of Joanna Cowden. So all in all, it's been a very nice day, topped off with the opportunity to talk to you about one of my favorite subjects, "Are We Rome or Are We Greece? America's Infatuation with Classical Antiquity." I'm hoping that in the Q & A, we'll get to answer the question. You guys, can decide, are we Rome or are we Greece? But I want to first give you some tools for understanding this question and it's important for American society. It's my belief that ever since the attacks of 9/11, Americans have embraced, especially ancient Rome as a way of framing their analysis of what happened to us on that day a little over 10 years ago. And what I want to show you today are some of the ways in which ancient Rome and to a lesser extent, ancient Greece have filled the American imagination and have become a fond of ideas so that when something like 9/11 happens, we have a frame of reference for understanding it. And in order to do that, I first have to denaturalize ancient Greece and Rome, but first I have to make my clicker work, there you go.
All right, this here is not Greek and Roman by any stretch of the imagination. You don't need me to tell you that. This is a Japanese Pagoda. And I'm showing it to you because if you went to Washington DC and walked down the National Mall and saw a bunch of Japanese Pagodas, you would think that it was very strange and very, very exotic. If the United States senate and House of Representatives met in a Japanese Pagoda, you would say, this is vert strange and unusual to me.
And yet, we walk down the National Mall in Washington DC and we see an architectural that is equally exotic and equally foreign and equally strange. But because we have made it so American, we do not see it in those ways. We see ancient Roman and ancient Greek motifs, ideas, and architecture as so utterly downed up with the American national project that we have forgotten that we should think that this is very, very weird to our eyes, that at the front we have the United States Congress that looks like it was pulled out of ancient Rome 2,000 years ago. You walk down a National Mall with museum on either side which are built in the image of ancient Greece and Rome and then you end up of all things at an ancient Egyptian obelisk, very strange. And yet we see all of these motifs as being utterly American. I'm here to talk to you today about why we do that and why we do that to ancient Greece and Rome rather than to Japanese Pagodas.
And before I leap back in time, I just want to give you some examples of the ways in which ancient Greece and Rome continue to assault our senses every single day or, especially me, every single hour, here are just two recent books on the topic. I could have put up about 10 more, Why America Is Not a New Rome on the left, and Are We Rome?: The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America. These are just two recent books that used the motifs of ancient Rome.
And then, of course, Iggy Pop, a commentator on American culture, America Is Rome, this is the considered opinion of Iggy Pop.
Any of you who remembers the Democratic National Convention in--of all places, Denver, Colorado in 2008 may have been surprised, possibly as surprised as I was to see Obama speaking in an ancient Greek temple, it really made my day. I think I was the happiest American on that night. Look, he's in a Greek temple, look, look, look, I won. Yes, there is Obama speaking in an ancient Greek temple. It was never explained. You can Google, "Obama ancient Greek temple" all you want and his campaign committee never explained why they looked to the Democracy of ancient Greece for the architecture of the Democratic National Convention.
If you go to Nashville, you can see a Parthenon. You just can, I don't know why. But it's there and you can go see it. It's a about 120 years old and we don't think it's strange because by the time you have driven through the south, you have seen so much classical architecture that it looks like it was born in the south and meant to be in the south. But it is as strange as a Japanese Pagoda.
Let me just give you my final example. If you do what I did and Google, "Obama ancient Greece or Rome," this is one of the things that you get. I have no idea what this means. I have no idea who did it, I just wanted to show it to you because it's weird. And it means that other people are thinking about modern politics and Laocoon, here, this Hellenistic statue. All right, so this has been a fun little tour here of some of the ways in which just very recently in the last five or 10 years, Americans have been thinking about ancient Greece and Rome. But now what I want to do is step back into ancient Greece and Rome separately to look at their separate careers in America and why each of them has attracted us in different ways. When we talk about ancient Greece and Rome, we often call them classical societies. We lump them together. This is a very modern idea, the word classical did not emerged in the English language until around 1600. The Greeks and Romans did not know that they were classical. The Romans knew about the Greeks and the Greeks knew about the Romans. But they did not know that about 1500 or 2,000 years later, modern societies would bundle them together, these two very different societies would be bundled together to form one cultural whole. So it's very important mow that we unbundle ancient Greece and Rome from the umbrella of classicism.
So let's start with ancient Greece, I'm sorry, ancient Rome and ask ourselves, why is it that Americans have turned to ancient Rome?
So this chart here is my effort to explain it to you in a nutshell. Ancient Rome is appealing for Americans from the 18th century forward because it's really, really easy to figure out what's good and what's bad about Rome. It's just a study in contrast. It's black and white. There aren't really gray areas when it comes to talking about ancient Rome. So we can look at all the good things that ancient Rome symbolizes for Americans, especially in the revolutionary period forward. They had these wonderful leaders, Cato, Brutus, Cincinnatus, the farmer who leaves his plow to take up arms in defense of Rome and then instead of becoming a warlord, returning back to his plow. There is liberty, the ideal of human freedom. There is the ideal of civic virtue that you do not think only of yourself and your own desires, rather, you think of the good of your country first. This is the ideal that Kennedy expressed when he said, "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country." He was channeling ancient Rome for us. Ancient Rome was a republic. It was not exclusively a monarchy. And American's intent on breaking away from the monarchy of George III in 1776 found in the past of Rome a model of a republic that had lasted for 500 years. So we're not even there yet, right? We're at--how many years are we now? 200 and--

>> 37.
>> 37? 38? We'll get it. But not 500, right. We're not there yet. So this was a great model for them to have. The ancient Romans valued farming and the rural life, not the city life of shopping and luxury. And they valued simplicity. As I've been talking down this chart your eyes have been moving toward the right hand side, so I don't need to go over it in detail. But you see very clearly why was the ancient Rome, in a day like the 18th century, they did not has political science. Political science had not been invented yet. The only thing people could do when they searched for models for creating their new republic was to look to the most successful republic in the history of the world. And that is the example that ancient Rome provided for them.
So I can just show you a few examples of what they did with all of this. We know so many of the classical symbols from the revolutionary period that this lecture could last for five days as I went through all of these. Don’t worry, it won't. But I'm just going to give you some highlights here. This is a very famous picture. It's hanging in the US capitol building. It's John Trumbull's fictitious rendition of George Washington, General George Washington resigning his commission of the continental army, an act that was performed in 1783. Now, this is the moment that establishes George Washington as Cincinnatus because he could have remained at the head of the continental army and established himself as a warlord and conquered all of America and maybe even the world. But instead, he resigned his commission and what did he do? He returned to the farm of Mt. Vernon until he was once again called forth to the service of his nation as the first president. But he had to be pulled, you know, kicking and screaming from Mt. Vernon. So this is the archetypal example of civic virtue. I should just tell you that it didn't happen like this at all. And there's a whole lot of artistic license being taken here but you can admire some of the fictitious detail such as the classical architecture, and that's Martha over there looking down from the right hand side.
Here's Washington again, he's the one sitting down sort of with the lap blanket--this--do you see him there? I'm afraid if I climb up here I'm going to fall when I walk down, but this is George Washington seated on the dome of the US Capitol. Why? Because like a Roman Emperor, he has experienced what is called an apotheosis. He has literally become a god because he's so amazing. So this is another example of Americans channeling the ideals of ancient Rome in making their leaders literally into secular gods.
Here’s George Washington again, I just kind of went on a little George Washington binge. This is when it doesn’t work to have a Roman motif. This was on the left, very famous statue made of George Washington by one of America’s premier sculptures, Horatio Greenough. And it was an attempt to model George Washington on the image you see on the right which you can interpret either as the god Zeus, if you're thinking about ancient Greece or as the god Jupiter, if you're thinking about ancient Rome. And the idea here is that George Washington is a kind of god-like figure for his country and he is seated and we should all worship him. But instead, Americans—so the year we're at here is 1840, we're at the height of the Victorian period here, American saw a naked guy sitting down looking like he had just emerged from the bath and was requesting that more clothes be brought. So this was not a successful rendition—a successful channeling of ancient Roman ideals. Many Americans were very offended by the presentation of their revered leader lacking clothing. And the statue was relegated to the basement of the capitol building until it reemerged a long time later when people had kind of come around to nudity a little bit more.
This is the very beginning, the picture on the right is the very beginning of the trends that I showed you in one of the first slides of the National Mall of Washington DC essentially being carpeted in Roman style buildings. The idea to make Roman style buildings, the face of the federal state and local government came from the Thomas Jefferson who was dispatched to France during the 1790s in order to help with the diplomatic arrangements that the new United States required with then Britain's archenemy, France. While he was in France, he took a trip from Paris down into the very south of France and saw what very, very few other Americans at the time had ever seen which was an actual, real Roman ruin. We have to remember how hard it was to travel at this time. So Thomas Jefferson became one of the only Americans of the 18th century to see an actual Roman ruin. And the one he saw was The Maison Carre in Nimes in the south of France which before had been part of the Roman Empire.
He saw that little temple on the left. And he literally fell in love with it. And he wrote a letter to one of his friends in Paris and he said, "I am gazing at this little temple like a lover at this mistress." Well, he was not to be stopped and he wrote to his colleagues in the US and said, "You've got to make the Virginia State Capitol building now that we are republic into the very image of this Roman building on the left. So the Richmond State Capitol building is a marvel of American architecture not because it's especially beautiful or grand, but because it is the very first building in the United States to explicitly use Roman republican architecture to proclaim the republican ideals of the United States using Roman motifs. So it's really one of the 10 buildings that changed America. And if any of you watched that PBS show that came on in May, 10 Buildings That Changed America, that was one of them. All right, let's keep going.
Civic virtue, the idea that you would put the ideals of the country above yourself was not just an ideal that was available to men, it was also an ideal that was available to women especially women who sacrifice, in their view, a great deal for the revolutionary cause. Even though they could not take up arms, like Cincinnatus, in the service of their country they could hold down the farm like—while their husbands went off to war. This is what exactly what happened in the marriage of John and Abigail Adams. Of course, John Adams never picked up gun during the American Revolution but he picked up his brain and wrote many, many important documents. He was often gone during the revolution leaving Abigail Adams in Massachusetts, in-charge of the farm, remember he's not one of the wealthy American patriots. He's a farmer. He needs the farm to work. Abigail is there with their four children. And he writes to her from Philadelphia or France and he writes to her as my dear Portia, because he’s imagining that he is like Brutus, the great patriot of ancient Rome and that as he is sacrificing for his country, she needs to sacrifice for the United States as well. Well, Abigail is not very excited about being Portia because she knows how much effort it requires to be Portia, but after a while, she gets into the idea of being Portia as well.
And any of you can go and see the original version of these letters at the Massachusetts Historical Society Collections online. You can actually see these letters in this form. They've also helpfully typed them up for you so you don't have to read the 18th century handwriting. There's a whole lot of Portia letters during the revolutionary years from 1776 until about 1783. Around that time, John Adams still loves to write to Abigail as Portia. She's gotten very tired of it at this point and drops it. And then eventually, he takes the hint and starts writing to her as he always did, my dearest friend. But Portia is a very, very vivid example of how the ideals of ancient Rome affected 18th century-American women as well.
I just want to give you one more example of women because we really do think that, you know, Roman ideals only weren't important to men but they were very affecting to women. If you have lived in the 18th century, you would have instantly recognized the parable in this painting. This is the very famous or then famous story of Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi. Cornelia was a very wealthy widow in ancient Rome. She's the woman standing in the very center of the painting all dressed in white. She has two sons, Gaius and Tiberius, and they're over there on the left. She's going to raise them to be good citizens of ancient Rome. And so you can see that the littlest one is holding a scroll. And if you look closely you can see that it says, ABC on it so, you know, he's learning his alphabet. So here are these little boys coming in and Cornelia is pointing to them. What's going on on the right is that a visitor has come and she is pulling all of her jewels out of the box and saying, look at my beautiful jewels. And Cornelia's daughter is fondling the jewels thinking I really like these jewels. But Cornelia is saying, I don't need jewels, these are my jewels, she says pointing to her sons, who I am raising in the service of Rome. So this is a very, very important parable for people's understanding of ancient Rome in the 18th century, that women are always susceptible like the little girl to fondling jewels but that we have to raise our sons and hopefully our daughters as well to resist the attractions of materialism and shopping malls so that we think of the service of Rome.
Now, I just want to show you, a 14-year-old girl's embroidery of the parable of Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi. It's not very good. She's only 14. But this was done in 1804 just a little while after the American Revolution. And it shows how much these Roman ideals penetrated way down into the bottom of society. All right, so that's, you know, we could talk about ancient Rome and 18th century American for a long time but those are just a few of the reasons why Americans have been attracted to ancient Rome.
Let's turn now to ancient Greece
The key question to ask about ancient Greece is why they didn't like it. Americans in the 18th century hated ancient Greece. They thought it was a really, really, really bad idea. But the one thing you wanted to do with ancient Greece was to not be like ancient Greece. And I'll give you a few examples of what that was so. First of all, and this is very difficult for us to imagine today because it's so easy for us to get to Greece. It was very hard to get to until 1830. Essentially, from about the 14th century until 1830, no one could get into ancient Greece or I guess at that point it was modern Greece because it was controlled by the Ottoman Turks. So all of those monuments that we now can go and see the date from the 5th and 4th centuries BC were blocked off to the outside world, many of them were repurposed by the Ottoman Turks for other uses. So minarets, for example, were built on the sides of buildings for Islamic worshipping, et cetera, et cetera. So you couldn't get there. They thought that the Greeks had too much democracy. They've really needed more control from above, less power to the people, they believed that there was also too much nudity, all of that statue where you just needed more clothing to suit 18th century taste.
They didn't like that all of those city states, Athens, Thebes, Sparta, had no centralized power. It was as though in the United States, all of the states were there, but there was no federal government. They tried this, remember they tried this for several years after 1776 in a disastrous experiment known as the Articles of Confederation which essentially placed the 13 colonies, now states, together in what they call the firm league of friendship. But there was no parent in charge. And the disastrous consequences led to the reformulation of the Articles of Confederation at the federal Constitutional Convention of 1787. So they looked to the examples of the ancient Greek states to see what not to do in the American Revolution. And finally, they took from the example of these city states. The idea that when you don't have a strong centralized power you will finally be conquered by nations much more powerful than yourself which in the 18th century, I mean Britain, which had the largest and most powerful navy in the world and France, which under Napoleon truly almost did conquer the world and Britain almost re-conquered the US in 1812. So the had a lot reasons to be thinking about why the ancient Greeks were not a great idea.
The text that really helped to change people's ideas about ancient Greece that gave us our modern understanding of ancient Greece was this book by two guys, James Stuart and Nicholas Revett called "The Antiquities of Athens." These two guys from Britain were some of the first Europeans to actually go to Greece and to actually look at the monuments and to actually measure the monuments and to actually make accurate pictures of the monuments which they published over the next
several decades from 1762 to 1816 in a series of books that are like that big. That you could see these beautiful ancient Greek remains and modern visions of the Greek people in front or them. Stuart and Revett's Antiquities of Athens, you can Google it and find it online, you can look for yourself and really enjoy these beautiful images revolutionized. The European and American understanding of ancient Greece, and essentially pulls us into the 19th century to the moment around 1820 or 1830 when Americans began to love ancient Greece, to love the idea that we would begin the story of our national development not in the city of Rome, but in the city of Athens, which was now celebrated as the birth place of democracy and of art and of culture. This is the moment in the 19th century when architecture swings away from ancient Rome and toward the architecture of ancient Greece with its much more massive columns. This is the moment when American universities begin to teach, not just about ancient Rome but to dig further back in time to tell their students that the first democracy in the world before the United States was ancient Greece. And soon thereafter, they invented something that we continue to teach today that I know my colleagues teach and I know it's probably taught here as well which is that there is this thing called Western civilization, a word that is coined around 1900. And that Western civilization represents an unbroken continuity of culture, beginning not in ancient Rome but before that, in ancient Greece. So there's this whole say of rehabilitation of ancient Greece that goes on in the 19th century. And a lot of it is thanks to Stuart and Revett's Antiquities if Athens and a series of other works that come out as well.
They represent a huge contrast to the kind of charges that were leveled against ancient Greece by none other than James Madison who couldn’t stand the ancient Greeks in Federalist 18 which is essentially a diatribe against the ancient Greeks about what an awful series of counter examples they present to Americans trying to forge ahead with their constitution, hence, the weakness, disorders and finally the destruction of the confederacy. He’s so afraid that Americans are going to stick with the Articles of Confederation rather than forging ahead with the stronger constitution.

“The Federalist #18:

“Hence the weakness, disorders, and finally the destruction of the confederacy.”

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I'll just leave you with one final example of ancient Greek architecture. It takes over the Antebellum South because among other things, the ancient Greeks had a slave society, very much like the United States South. Around 30 percent to 40 percent of the population in the ancient Greek was enslaved. Abolitionists were on the attack by the 1830s and '40s telling southern planters that they should not have, however, many slaves they had, it was about three million at that point in time. Southern planters responded by saying, no, look to the ancient Greeks they had slaves liberating their masters for the noble work of governance, read it, it's in Aristotle. And so they decided to build many of their plantation homes explicitly in the style of ancient Greek architecture in order to announce the fact that they were not just a slave society but they were proud of being a slave society because it freed them for the work of governance. OK, so now you're all experts on the separate traditions of ancient Greece and Rome and America, the very different things that they are telling us.
The final part of the lecture here is going to be showing you a series of five paintings, all painted by one guy, a guy named Thomas Cole that is telling Americans the story of themselves. I'm just going to give you the first one here to tell you how to decode this.
I'm sure a lot of you have heard of Thomas Cole, he's one of the founders of the Hudson River School of Painting, one of the greatest and most celebrated landscape painters in America. But by 1830, America was about 50 years old, and they were wondering what are we doing, where are we going and how do we know if where we are going is the right place to be going, how do we run diagnostics on our nation? They looked to ancient Rome to give them some of the answers to that question just as we do today. And Thomas Cole answered that question in these series of five paintings called The Course of Empire series. These are on display in Washington DC. I believe they are in the national gallery, don't quote me on that, but it's somewhere in Washington DC. Let me tell you how to decode these paintings as I run through them. This is essentially time-lapse photography before there was photography. So it's time-lapse painting. We're always in the same place but the paintings are going to carry us through time. And it's an allegory of America as Rome. So how do you know you're always in the same place? You always know you're in the same place because there is that big precipice in the background with a little rock perched on the top, right, it looks like it's going to go plop and fall off the top.
And what Cole is doing is allowing a drama of national development to play out in front of that rock. So in this first scene, here we are at the beginning, he calls it the Savage State. This is the most primitive way of living in the United States as he sees it. So on the right, and you know, remember we’re dealing with a different age here than our own, on the right, he places the teepees of American Indians. This is the most primitive scene he can imagine. And this guy, I don’t know if you can see him, he looks sort of like a caveman running in down here on the left with his bow and arrow. He's chasing a stag who's leaping down over creek below. The waters are rough, sky is very, very disturbed, the wind is blowing, we are in the Savage State.
until we wait for the Pastoral State. And here we are in the next stage. See we're in
the same place, there's our cliff with the rock. But now, this is Jefferson's vision of
America, if Jefferson could have painted, I don't think he was a good painter, maybe
he was, he was good at a lot of things. This is what he would have painted. This is his
image of America as the well-tended garden. This is why he bought the Louisiana
territory in 1803, which overnight doubled the size of the United States. He wanted
to create a great garden for America so that the farmers would move to the west and
tame the land and make it look like this. And that we would stay in this wonderful
stage forever. A wonderful stage where the sky is always calm, the waters are always
peaceful, there's a little guy tending his sheep, I don't know what this person here on
the left is doing. But it's so calm that the people in the background can dance in what
before was a savage forest is now a beautifully tended grove and there is a child at
the bottom playing in what looks like a sandbox. So this is the image of where
Jefferson wanted America to stay and Thomas Cole captures it as a vision in 1830.
It's hard to believe that we're still in the same place, but you can find our rock. It's over there on the right hand side, but it's almost smothered by the huge amount of stuff like a huge shopping mall that has been built in front what was the pastoral peacefulness of the previous scene. This is incredible. This—if you—and I wish if you do go to Washington to see these paintings get up really, really close. Don't let the security keep you at bay 'cause they'll try but you just go up pretty really close. And you'll see it's like where's Waldo, there's so much detail but you just have to expect all of it. Let me just point out a little of the detail to you. Almost all the buildings are literally painted with gold. A statue of Minerva, the goddess of war and wisdom is overlooking the scene. These massive people in front is a roman triumphal procession. This is an emperor taking possession of Rome, America, I don't know. The harbor is teeming with ships, commerce is everywhere, the people in front are enjoying a luxurious feast, a mid-potted plants, it's high noon in America or Rome. Or is it?
This is the next scene, destruction. Find our rock, we’re in the same place, but look what happened, disaster. The Roman triumphal procession is now proceeding into the water as the bridge breaks down under them. Soldiers are on the attack, the sky is a disaster, the waters are very disturbed, everything is on fire. Something has gone wrong, but what? This is the great question that Rome gives to us. Something has gone wrong in this scene of American and Roman national development to make it so that the people have been attacked, they have been made weak and they have been attacked. But what was it? Was it an external force that attacked a noble people or was the people made so rotten inside by their own greed and selfishness that they were made weak and susceptible to external attack? This painting asks those questions but it does answer those questions.
And this is the final canvass, desolation. It's the only one that's at night and my students always think this is the prettiest one, 'cause they like to go hiking and backpacking. And there's no people in this one, this is the only one with no people. You can almost hear the crickets chirping in this image. Nature has reclaims, the majesty and grandeur that was Rome and America. A mother bird is making a nest on top of the column. And we asked ourselves also, is this good? That nature is reclaiming Rome and America? Or is this a sign that something has continued to go terribly wrong. That we are failing to rebuilt after the destruction of the previous canvass. And we ask ourselves are ruins beautiful? And what kinds of lessons do ruins offer to? When we see destruction what do we do? So you can see through these canvasses in Thomas Cole's Course of Empire series that the image of Rome has always done one thing above all else for Americans. It has given them the grandest stage in the world for projecting their national ambitions. Rome lasted for 1000 years. We're not even to 250. And yet it continues to offer lessons for us.
And I'll leave you with the final picture coming right after the final image of Thomas Cole. When we look at the image of destruction from the outside that 9/11 gave us, we ask ourselves questions. The attack came from the outside but why were we made weak? Why were we susceptible to attack? Where is the moral rot? Is it outside of us or is it within all of us?

The photographers of 9/11 were thinking in these terms about the beauty and power of ruins to channel a huge conversation about the majesty of the rise and the fall of ancient Rome. So that's the answer I think to the question why have Americans loved Greece but especially Rome. It's because it places our puny little national history onto the grandest stage of all, and it gives us very, very powerful and useful frames of reference for understanding our nation and for understanding ourselves. Thank you.

[ Applause ]