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## ***BOOK REVIEWS***

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Mark David Spence: *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

A well researched and referenced book on the removal of the Native Peoples from three of the most important National Parks in the US, Yellowstone (established 1872), Yosemite (established as a state park in 1864 and a national park 1890) and Glacier (established 1910). These parks, located in the Rockies of western US, play an important role in the enduring concept in US culture of “wilderness.” US law defines wilderness as “places where the earth and community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” This idea of wilderness is a myth. People have shaped all the world's landscapes and environments (except Antarctica) for tens of thousands of years. The areas that were set apart as parks, had been the homes of First Nations for centuries. They knew the land and influenced its appearance and ecosystems. These places only became “untrammelled” by their forced removal.

Spence outlines the development by the new Americans, European settlers and their descendants, of the myth of wildernesses and their changing cultural views of the Native Peoples. On the one hand there was a view that the areas unsettled by the Americans were beautiful and “unspoilt” and this landscape included the Native Peoples, often described as “natural” and “nobl.”. These ideas drew on English and European Romanticism. On the other hand was the view that these lands needed to be tamed and controlled and the Native Peoples were “savages” who needed to be “civilized” or removed.

Spence argues that the second view came to dominate official and popular thinking from the 1860s onward. The romanticism of nature continued but increasingly it was purged of people. The myth developed that the lands of the west were largely empty of, and untouched by, humans. This is in contrast to Wordsworth, an English Romantic, who viewed the residents of the Lake District as an important part of his romanticism, having a simplicity and wisdom arising from their closeness to nature. US Romanticism became to be of “wilderness,” of the grandeur of mountains, forests, plains and rivers, but all empty.

Spence details how step by step the Native Peoples were removed from the parks, places where they had lived, gathered and hunted for centuries. They suffered harassment, including military force and arrest, their houses burnt down, and the decline in the availability of the foods they gathered due to the actions of the managers of the parks. The Federal government used laws alien to the First Nations to declare activities established for centuries to be illegal. The government didn't bother with any pretence of justice, often changing and re-interpreting existing laws to suit the aim of removal of the Native Peoples. Their only acceptable presence in the parks was as workers or as a false tourist attraction, in a mockery of their own history and traditions.

The book is only 140 pages of text and primarily focuses on the development of these parks. Spence does briefly link the changes in outlook and in policy to wider issues but concentrates on cultural ideas. He does not clearly enough locate these changes in the wider context of American society. This focus on culture and the shift from the view of the First Nations as "noble" people who are part of the landscape seems to imply that there was a more tolerant attitude to the First Nations prior to the Civil War.

The creation of the national parks and the linked attitude to the Native Peoples flowed from the development of the US. In a few decades the nation's leaders moved from the revolutionary struggle against British imperialism in the 1770s to an imperialist conquest of territory, invading what became Canada in 1812 and taking Florida from Spain by 1821.

The conquest of continental America involved wars against European colonial powers (England and Spain) and nations (Mexico) and the long established First Nations. Against the First Nations the US government waged war to remove them from the lands they had lived on. Most of the peoples of the Nations east of the Mississippi had been killed, in war or by diseases, or driven west (e.g., Delaware, Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw and Seminole) by 1840. There was no sign of appreciation of these Nations as "noble." The Cherokee were put in concentration camps and thousands of them forced to march hundreds of mile in the cold of winter.

For a few decades in the mid-1800s there was a slowing down of the war as the area east of the Mississippi was settled and agriculture and industry expanded. During this time the remainder of the continental land mass was acquired by war or the threat of war (Oregon territories, Texas and Mexican cession) Also the idea of "Manifest Destiny," that the US had a right to rule the land from coast to coast, became

common-place. As Spence puts it “America’s Manifest Destiny required the physical or cultural destruction of all native peoples” (p. 30).

Following the defeat of the South in the Civil War the Federal government and business were ready to conquer the “west.” The steel plough, railways, guns and barbed wire were readily available to aid this process. To ensure control of the territories of the west and to extract wealth a new population had to be settled. This meant that the existing population was removed and those few that remained were herded into small reservations without access to most of their traditional resources. Spence does recognise that the US government waged war against the Native Peoples to conquer the west but the book lacks the rightful passion and anger of other authors on this subject such as Dee Brown in *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*.

Spence’s book is a valuable contribution to understanding a chapter of the conquest of continental America, the first phase of US imperialism. However, it will be up to others to put this work in the wider context of the policy of American government and business both within the US and internationally.

The book would have been richer if the expulsion from the parks of the US was linked to what is happening today in other parts of the world. The myth of wilderness has been exported from the US and is being used to justify removing people from protected areas in Africa, Asia and Latin America. This raises points for discussion on the concept of wilderness, as places empty of people, supported by some environmental groups. — **Bill Hopwood**

Benjamin Seel, Matthew Paterson, and Brian Doherty, eds., *Direct Action in British Environmentalism*. London: Routledge, 2000.

You can write a letter and lobby. Then again, you can take a personal risk and crouch in a dark and damp tunnel carved underground to prevent heavy machinery from working on a road-building project above; march to a genetically modified testing ground and pull up the GM plants, or “subvertise” by transforming the meaning of an ad by substituting its text with a radical message (p. 102).

This thoroughly well-written and exciting edited collection provides a refreshing look at direct action tactics, their origins and evolution, and their influence on civil society, industry, and government policies. The

book came from a 1997 conference at Keele University in Great Britain involving academics and activists, and is one of the few books on environmental politics that is essential reading for both bookworms and tunnelers.

Direct actions are attempts by protesters to “change environmental conditions around them directly” (p. 1). This often involves physically placing one’s body in the way to obstruct environmentally destructive behavior. The tactical repertoire of eco-activists ranges from subvertising, demonstrations, blockades, the use of lock-ons, walkways between trees or houses, tripods to tunnels (a British innovation).

In a colorful chapter, Brian Doherty describes the evolution of tactics such as lock-ons. It started with members of the suffragette movement chaining themselves to railings. Then came the bicycle D-lock, which eventually the hydraulic bolt cutter could remove quickly. Now concrete lock-ons are a must for eco-activists who sometimes add rubber, metal and glass to the concrete to hamper the drills. The most daring of protesters lock-on in tunnels for days on end. Many of these remarkable eco-activists are young protesters in their late teens, propelled by idealism, passion and knowledge of environmental threats.

In an interesting chapter on the diffusion of tactics, Derek Wall finds that environmentalists drew from the non-violent direct action tactics used by the Greenham peace movement. There is also the strong British tradition of animal rights activities aimed at preventing cruelty to animals, starting with the Hunt Saboteurs Association, created in the 1960s, and the Band of Mercy in 1973, later named the Animal Liberation Front in 1976.

A quantitative chapter by Christopher Rootes provides the curious finding that Britain was the only country in Europe with a surge of direct action in the 1990s. The new wave of direct action which swept Britain was unexpected given the growing institutionalization of key environmental groups like Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace.

At a time when there was a rise in environmental concerns, many radical eco-activists felt that existing, highly institutionalized environmental organizations were not meeting the activists’ expectations for confronting assaults on the environment. In large part the surge can be attributed to the rise of the anti-road protest movement. The first British Earth First! group, formed in 1991, began with a focus on rainforest protection. By 1992-93, it played a catalytic role, along with ALARM (All London Against the Road Menace), a UK-wide group networking with over 750 local anti-road groups between 1991-98, in mobilizing many of the over a dozen anti-road camps set up to resist the Thatcher

government's provocative 1989 "Roads for Prosperity" building program.

Why do activists engage in direct action? One of the key reasons is to politicize issues and place environmental concerns on the political agenda. "Swampy," Britain's most famous tunneler, told the press after emerging from the "Big Momma" tunnel in 1997 that: "It is the only way to get a voice these days. If I had written a letter to my MP, would I have achieved all this? Would you lot be here now? I think not." (pp. 159-60).

A useful complement to this book is Bill Moyer's edited volume, *Doing Democracy: the MAP [Movement Action Plan] Model for Organizing Social Movements*, which makes the point that the prominence of direct action-type groups is critical in the early stages of social movements. Rebel groups use direct action and the media in order to raise awareness and place an issue on the political agenda. Direct actions can have a series of impacts, ranging from delaying construction, escalating costs, extensive media coverage, altering public perspectives on such institutions as car culture and big business, and changing public policy.

The impact of direct action is not only felt by governments and corporate actors. Direct action helps radicalize more mainstream environmental groups through the radical flack effect. This effect shifts the middle ground as well as increases the leverage of more institutionalized environmental groups in their negotiations with government.

With the fall of the "Roads for Prosperity" road-building program in the late 1990s and the election of the Labour government, there are now fewer protest sites in Great Britain. However, like elsewhere, the focus of social movements has now shifted from issue-oriented protests to a more systematic critique of the problem of capitalism and corporate globalization (p. 127). What is needed is a similar, energetic book on post-Seattle global direct action written equally for engaged scholars and protesters. — **Anita Krajnc**

John Miller: *Egotopia: Narcissism and the New American Landscape*. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, Alabama. 1997.

This book starts out with a great deal of promise, chronicling and dissecting what Miller calls the "New American Landscape:" suburban

sprawl where aesthetics are wholly subordinated to and placed in the service of unfettered consumption. Who among us traveling by car along interstates and dipping into suburbs can fail to notice the pervasive ugliness, banality, artificiality, sameness and sterility that pass for the contemporary American dream?

The suburbanization of America has several roots, including the dictates of capital, racial, and social factors, but it has also come about as result of the collapse of the idea of the city. Miller writes: “America has become suburbanized because the idea and the ideal of the city [as a place big enough to encompass every race and class] has failed, broke down, to be replaced by the idea and the ideal of the suburb. The contemporary and future American landscape can only be fully understood within the context of changing notions of individual and collective identity.” (p. 5)

He persuasively argues that the death of public man (sic) — that is, the transcendence of self-interest and self-absorption — has resulted inevitably in the rise of the megaself, dedicated to the pursuit of individual satisfactions. Thus, narcissism — the elevation of the individual as “megaself” — and the New American Landscape, are intimately connected. In a particularly eloquent passage, Miller tells us that “Therapists advise us to get in touch with our feelings, not with our sense of ethics. Educators lecture us that students need to develop self-esteem, not their intellectual capabilities. Spiritual healers, on public television no less, caution us to attend to the needs of our inner child, rather than minister to the needs of inner-city children.” (pp. 34-35)

This line of inquiry provides a great deal of promise. Unfortunately, Miller does not follow that path. The shortcoming of this book, and it is a big one, is that while Miller does a fine job of descriptively chronicling some hoarier characteristics of contemporary America, his analysis of where this all comes from falls very short. In brief, he explicitly rejects the notion that there are any economic or political sources for this: “The New American Landscape is the physical transformation of public space into a literal market-place for which surely there is no economic necessity and every evidence of psychological obsession.” (p. 42) And further, “What we are dealing with is not so much the evidence of a Madison Avenue conspiracy haranguing us to buy snake oil as our collective cultural need to be the constant recipients of instructions in the liturgy of consumption.” (p. 43)

In essence, Miller holds that capitalism, American-style, evolved out of a collective cultural need to consume. He has reversed the actual

order of events. His line of argument misses the central point: corporate America *requires* that the domestic market be plied vigorously and continuously. In the second quarter of 2001, personal domestic consumption expenditures made up fully 69 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product (Bureau of Economic Statistics, Department of Commerce). While U.S. big business does draw a *disproportionate* portion of its profit from overseas investments, the domestic market occupies a very large portion of its business. One does not need to resort to conspiracy mongering to recognize the key role that corporate power plays. Fordism, indeed, describes the regime, named after Henry Ford, in which a mass, domestic consumer economy was cultivated alongside mass production.

Miller states that big business “has neither the capability nor the imagination to even begin successfully designing and constructing an environment with the power to subconsciously influence people’s habits and patterns of consumption.” (pp. 50-51) But isn’t that precisely what advertising consists of today (and yesterday)?

Miller himself cites a telling statistic in this regard: in the first nine months of 1986, liquor advertisers spent almost sixteen times as much on billboards aimed at African-Americans as they spent on advertising to the general public. (p. 98) Are we to read this datum as an example of the singular demands by African-Americans for alcohol, since Miller holds that the New American Landscape grows out of a collective cultural demand? Or, does it represent the hawking of goods to a subjugated population?

Malls did not come into being because the public demanded the kind of quasi-public space that malls proffer. Malls came into being because they are effective promoters of consumption. Miller holds in one passage that the U.S. has “a population restless, agitated, and hungry for something real.” (p. 81) But everywhere else he hammers the majority for setting the awful aesthetic standards that he rails against. “If we are not a socialist state, it is not because we are undemocratic. It is because the majority repeatedly rejects socialism in favor of the status quo.” (p. 150)

A significant portion of the book recounts the history of American billboards and Miller properly critiques Scenic America for its elitism, leading to its failure to defeat the billboard lobby. Unfortunately, attributing the ugliness and sterility of the New American Landscape to the American public as a whole evidences another kind of elitism.

This book is worth a perusal, but its prescription lacks punch because its diagnosis misses the mark. — **Dennis D. Loo**

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By other central country standards, US social security is weak, its working hours long, its vacations short, its job security minimal, its vulnerability to economic scandals high, its justice shows more marked biases towards the rich than elsewhere, and its judicial punishments are extreme. A word can be said about its policies towards addiction to certain drugs which have been declared illegal (the most prevalent drugs, alcohol and tobacco are legal, even though their damage to health and their addictive capacity, especially of the latter, have been overwhelmingly proved). The approach is very punitive towards individual users and pushers, not towards the banks which process the resulting profits. One in every five convicts in the world currently is imprisoned in the US and a third of these have been jailed from transgressions which are mild by the standards of all other central countries. This policy appears to have been adopted to serve a triple purpose: the demonization of an isolated social problem in order not to focus on a wider social analysis, the militarization of certain problematic areas of cities, the disenfranchising and incarceration of members of troublesome, or potentially troublesome, social groups.

To sum up all this, it appears that a strong State with fairly strong welfare commitments, the result of historical developments and of painful events in other central countries, never developed in the US, and that this vacuum has been filled with interest groups of all sorts, the most powerful by far being concentrated capital. This threatens legitimacy problems in the long run. Also, a combination of a weakening political legitimacy and a martial approach to tackling international problems (especially after September 11, 2001) tempts its governing class to replace consensus through building up civil society by consensus through waging war. As long-term recession deepens, and with more than half of the US population getting poorer, historical precedents in the country fail to dispel pessimism. After all, by George Bush Jr. standards, Herbert Hoover was a humanist, and there is no FDR in sight. US watchers are indeed an anxious lot. — **José Carlos Escudero**

