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David Stradling. *Making Mountains: New York City and the Catskills.* Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books Series. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007. Illustrations. xxvii + 311 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-98747-7.

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Rethinking Rurality

For many urban historians, rural space exists as a tabula rasa, a green area on the planning map awaiting the arrival of the first bulldozer and the opening of the crabgrass frontier. Even the new suburban history of scholars, such as Matthew Lassiter and Robert Self, has implicitly reinforced an artificial boundary that often obscures far-reaching effects of urban growth. In contrast, rural and, to a lesser extent, environmental historians have had a difficult time in effectively negotiating the complicated social and cultural bonds that link the countryside to the city. This is particularly true for scholars of the twentieth century when agriculture was no longer the defining feature of many rural areas and highway construction along with suburbanization increasingly broke down geographical barriers between cities and small towns. The changing shape of the American metropolis, thus, calls for a rethinking of what it means to be rural and an acknowledgement of the important regional bonds linking urban, suburban, and rural communities.

David Stradling's *Making Mountains* goes a long way toward bridging this divide between city and countryside. *Making Mountains* follows an intellectual trajectory that began with Raymond Williams's classic *The Country and the City* (1967); was revitalized with William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991); and includes more recent works, such as Gray Brechin's *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (1999), Matthew Gandy's *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City* (2002), and David Walbert's *Garden Spot: Lancaster County, the Old Order Amish, and the Selling of Rural America* (2002). Indeed, in the book's foreword, Cronon, editor of the Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books series of which *Making Mountains* is a part, highlights the interconnection of urban and rural in "a wild mountain landscape whose past is inexplicable if one fails to explore the ways in which Catskill history is bound up with that of New York City" (p. xi).

Unlike some works that only emphasize the power of cities in reshaping their regions, however, Stradling moves away from the purely imperial model of urban control of the countryside and provides a more nuanced tale "of a landscape shaped by many hands, many minds–some urban, some rural, many that were both" (p. 15). This collaborative process, though often tense and undoubtedly featuring partners wielding unequal power, forms the narrative heart of *Making Mountains*. The book flows in a series of thematic and loosely chronological chapters from the natural resource extraction of the early nineteenth century, to the development of a rural wilderness ideal by urban artists and literary figures, the creation of reservoirs to provide the city with pure mountain water, the rise of the Borscht Belt, and finally the direct incorporation of the Catskills into the sprawl of the New York City metropolis.

The first half of the text investigates the artistic and physical evolution of the Catskills from a hilly region of small-scale agriculture, lumbering, and quarrying to a tourist destination attracting many thousands of urban residents every year, to the massive "mountain hotels" overlooking the Hudson River. Two developments intimately tied to the rise of New York City one hundred miles to the south made possible this transformation. The publication of James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823-41) along with Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" (1819) and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820)

provided a mythology for the region that, while fictional, served as a benchmark for understanding the Catskills as a rural antidote to the rapid social changes of the nineteenth-century metropolis. The central position of the region in the young nation's cultural imagination was further solidified by the artworks of the Hudson River School, which emphasized the American landscape as a transcendent manifestation of God. Subsequently, the search for the sublime depicted in the works of Thomas Cole, who split his time between New York City and a mountain studio, led thousands of urban pilgrims to the Catskill Mountain House and Hotel Kaaterskill as well as hundreds of smaller boarding houses that formed the basis for a thriving tourist industry.

Along with the artistic creation of a Catskills culture, urban capital from Gotham, in the form of the railroad, helped redefine the regional landscape. By 1880, the Ulster and Delaware road carried 111,000 passengers, "the vast majority of them summer tourists" (p. 90). In addition to allowing cheaper, faster access, the railroads also helped to shape the image of the Catskills through advertising, which emphasized the fresh mountain air and water, the region's literary heritage, and the availability of accommodations that one guide proclaimed " 'are on every side– in front of you, behind you, to the right of you, to the left of you, above you, on the mountain tops, below you in the valley' " (p. 94). Indeed, by the turn of the century nearly five hundred thousand people visited the more than one thousand hotels, farmhouses, and boardinghouses scattered throughout the region.

This juxtaposition of a region that was celebrated as the quintessential rural space at the same time as it was becoming increasingly urban serves as the springboard for the second part of the book, which begins with the creation of the Catskill and Adirondack Forest Preserve in 1885, extends to the appropriation of large swaths of land by New York City's Board of Water Supply, and concludes with the remapping of the Catskills as a Jewish-oriented tourist district at some distance from the mountains themselves. In "Making Wilderness" and "Mountain Water," Stradling builds from the work of Karl Jacoby, Mark Spence, and others in exploring the cultural construction of a wilderness ideal among urban residents and the use of state power to "build a usable wilderness in the mountains" (p. 110). Ironically, the very success of the state in creating "an altered landscape, one that invited the use of the mountains as an urban wilderness retreat" made the region that much more desirable in the eyes of a thirsty city (p. 123). Indeed, through the creation of massive reservoirs, the purchase of adjacent land, and the passage of state legislation to protect the water supply, New York City became one of the largest landowners in the Catskills with regulatory control over a myriad of local practices from septic tanks to swimming.

Stradling emphasizes the ways in which urban residents brought the city to the countryside and in the process remade the physical and social landscape of the Catskills. This process was central to the creation of what became known as the "Borscht Belt," a network of hotels and bungalow colonies catering primarily to Jewish tourists that, due to rampant anti-Semitism, developed south of the older vacation center in the Catskills highlands. While New York City Jews began visiting the region for much the same reason as other urban residents, by the mid-twentieth century the rural Catskills became a cultural mirror to the garment district of the Lower East Side, "the place where Jews participated in rituals of the broader culture, in leisure and consumption" (p. 179). Interestingly, even as Jewish tourism reached its peak during the 1950s, the line between the experience of city and country grew even more blurry as high-rise hotels, nationally recognized entertainment, and indoor recreation "created an urban atmosphere in the mountains … [that] did not center on the consumption of nature, let alone wilderness" (p. 195).

If the development of the railroad blurred the separation between urban and rural in the Catskills, the rise of the automobile and subsequent outward expansion of the metropolis threatened to obliterate the division entirely. In the book's final chapter, "A Suburb of New York," Stradling explores the ways in which highways, especially the New York State Thruway, made the Catskills an extension of the city even as a vibrant artistic scene centered on the town of Woodstock once more refashioned the Catskills in the national imagination. As with many other northern Appalachian communities, local residents were both leery of losing control of their communities to the new subdivisions popping up near highway exits and hungry for the economic opportunities that might allow their children to make a living and stay in the country. The chapter ends with a discussion of the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, a group formed in 1969 that "intentionally linked environmental protection with economic development" (p. 232). While this proved a difficult balancing act with little economic improvement or regulation of subdivisions through the 1980s, for Stradling the group "represented yet another phase in the long collaboration between city and local residents in shaping the mountain landscape" (p. 239).

Throughout *Making Mountains*, the author insightfully uses the concept of cultural space, particularly its role for urban residents in defining and redefining the region in accordance with the evolving needs of the city. From the creation of "The Catskills" as a sublime landscape on par with the Rockies or Alps (despite their more modest physical reality), to the emerging geography of tourist consumption, to the creation of "wilderness" areas that would "remain" forever wild, to the shifting boundaries of the Catskills themselves first northward to allow easier access from the railroad and then southward to reflect the rise of the Borscht Belt, the text provides ample evidence of the ways in which changes in the mountains "happened largely because of changes taking place at some distance, in the city" (p. 6). Of particular note was the discussion of the creation of the "Catskills Watershed" by the city's Board of Water Supply in which the region's signature topography appears "not as mountains, but as watersheds, inverted mountains" superimposed by "concentric circles [that] radiated out from Manhattan, marking distances from the city … as if to reveal the true extent of the city's command" (pp. 172-173).

In tandem with the cultural construction of regional space, Stradling does an excellent job of explaining the multiple economic transitions of the Catskills as a result of collaborations between urban and rural residents. Far from the static vision of nostalgic visitors, this was a landscape of profound and repeated transformation, from market agriculture and natural resource extraction through the arrival of genteel visitors and later the mass tourism of the railroad age, and finally to the automobile suburbanization of the postwar period. In contrast to the bulk of environmental history scholarship, *Making Mountains* provides no simple declension narrative about "the arrival of the market and the damage it has wrought" (p. 11). Indeed, in the Catskills as in the Adirondacks and many other "natural" areas, it is only with the arrival of the tourist market that wilderness could be created.

In the end, *Making Mountains* is perhaps the best example yet of a small but growing literature that links urban, suburban, and rural space into a synthetic narrative of social and environmental change. Stradling neither dismisses rurality as a static and homogenous placeholder irrelevant until colonized by the suburbs nor privileges simplistic ideals, whether of wilderness or bucolic agrarianism, that do not reflect the complexity of life beyond the metropolis. In this regard, however, his treatment of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is stronger and more nuanced than the final chapter on postwar suburbanization. While in the book's epilogue the author imagines a conversation with his great-grandfather (a Catskills resident) who may have supported resort development because it "would have meant economic opportunities for his sons, a chance to stay in the mountains," his narrative tended to emphasize the views of activists associated with the Catskill Center without providing sufficient counterexamples from other perspectives (p. 247). That said, *Making Mountains* is an outstanding work of environmental and urban history that should remind scholars that despite the apparent distance between the two, the city and the country share a common history and a common future.

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