

Mark S. Monmonier. *No Dig, No Fly, No Go: How Maps Restrict and Control*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. xiii + 242 pp. \$18.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-226-53468-8.



Reviewed by Richard Harris

Published on H-HistGeog (July, 2010)

Commissioned by Robert J. Mayhew (University of Bristol)

Had this book arrived without its cover, the author would have remained obvious. This is a Mark Monmonier text through and through: well written, engaging, mildly provocative, quirky at times, lavishly illustrated (albeit in black and white) and underpinned by a dry but generous sense of humor. It is full of interesting examples of how maps are used to naturalize claims to territory and then to restrict access.

As it happens my copy came fully intact with the blurb describing it as “a worthy successor to his critically acclaimed *How to Lie with Maps*.” Well, yes, it is a successor and its predecessor has been critically acclaimed (rightly so). There is also a return to previous themes, most notably an expanded discussion of gerrymandering boundaries for political gain (with the passing note that its namesake, Governor Elbridge Gerry, has been somewhat unfairly associated with the process).

However, as Monmonier himself writes, the new book is better understood as the fourth in a series of short cartographic histories exploring

the evolution and impact of a map symbol or feature. The first, *Rhumb Lines and Map Wars* (2004) is about grid lines. *From Square Tit to Whorehouse Meadow* (2006) is about standardized place and feature names. *Coast Lines* (2008) is about how mapmakers frame the world and chart environmental change. In his new book Monmonier turns to “prohibitive cartography”—how cartography works as a mapping tool, leading to “our unconscious acceptance of cartographic boundaries of all types as natural, beneficial, and worth obeying” (p. xii).

The key point is that boundaries matter. They delimit and (literally) ground a claim to territorial possession. By doing so they shout to would-be trespassers, “keep out!” This is true at multiple scales.

Monmonier begins by looking at property properties, how they have been surveyed and marked, and the challenges of recovering a boundary described by historical landmarks. A discussion of frontier lands shows how large

tracts of the United States were carved into apparently regular grids but ones that converge towards the North Pole. Hence the phenomenon of otherwise long and straight roads having occasional and seemingly inexplicable bends: they are due to the offset of land boundaries, correcting for converging meridians.

Turning to geopolitics, Monmonier considers the construction of physical barriers such as the Israeli security fence around the West Bank, the creation of national boundaries based on ethno-cultural and economic criteria of “self-determination” after World War I, and present-day territorial boundaries claimed by “absentee landlords” (Monmonier’s phrase). An example of the third is in Antarctica where neat but not undisputed boundaries divide the polar pie into national slices, the boundaries of which extend out and are defined by conveniently located coastal positions, islands, and landmarks on other continents.

Even more natural boundaries are scrutinized for the false sense of obviousness they attempt to bestow. Water rights are particularly problematic. Who, for example, owns the land that is eroded from one shore and deposited on another? And what if that changing landscape also happens to define a nation’s boundary? How about maritime boundaries? It’s all very well to say they extend a certain distance from the shoreline but coastlines are fractal so what is the appropriate level of generalization to apply to the map before making the measurement? Then there are the complications of estuaries, submerged land, continental shelves, and offshore islands. The use of cartography to defend, define, and contest territorial claims is fascinating, as are the legal-cum-moral asides: does an island nation retain its claim to maritime waters if it is submerged by rising sea levels due to climate change? It’s less of a moot discussion for residents of the Maldives.

Whereas some boundaries define ownership, others delimit what can take place within, or

what or who should be kept out. Examples including municipal zoning plans that range from micro-managing the architectural and physical appearance of “historic neighborhoods” to controlling the types of commerce and business that may take place within. But not entirely: adult shops have the right to operate somewhere. The dilemma for the city official is where: away from schools and religious buildings, of course, but then all together in a single “adult use district” or dispersed across the region? Or perhaps they could be directed to a corner of the municipality where the only access route is from across the border?

Throughout the book Monmonier eloquently describes a wide range of case studies in a manner that retains but does not swamp the reader in detail, the uniqueness and, often, outright bizarreness of particular circumstances. At the same time, the studies come together to demonstrate how simple lines on a map belie protracted negotiations, legal complexities, claims and counterclaims, and the ulterior motivations behind the questionable logic that lays claim to territory. It is, perhaps, a little too descriptive. The text lacks a discussion of the power of maps (to cite another book title) to beguile and seduce. How actually do maps work? Do they really restrict or are they simply the end product—the cartographic visualization of prior decisions to restrict and control? Each chapter has only a brief introduction and the end tends to be left hanging. Whilst this leaves readers free to draw their own conclusions, some may want a little more sign-posting about the path the text is taking and what is to be learned along the way.

A second minor criticism I have is that the title frames a generally negative view of how maps operate: *no dig, no fly, no go*. However, as the book itself makes clear, boundaries are constructed and maps make them visible. That means they can be contested. Perhaps the book might have ended on a more positive note, looking at partici-

patory mapping or so-called (but dubiously named) neogeography, where new technologies and access to data enable the world to be mapped and imagined from multiple points of view.

These are quibbles. The book is excellent and scholarly throughout, well written for anyone who is interested in the importance of maps in society and on the world stage. It should be required reading for all students of geography and is a highly recommended addition to the Monmonier canon.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-histgeog>

Citation: Richard Harris. Review of Monmonier, Mark S. *No Dig, No Fly, No Go: How Maps Restrict and Control*. H-HistGeog, H-Net Reviews. July, 2010.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=30716>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.