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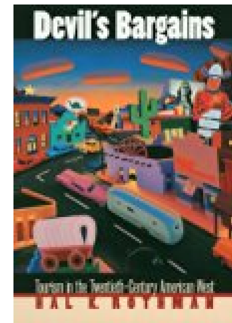
Hal K. Rothman. *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998. xi + 434. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-0910-9.



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Whose West Is This Anyway?

Hal Rothman makes a crucial choice in *Devil's Bargains*, his important new book on tourism in the twentieth-century American West. Where previous scholars of tourism often have focused on tourists and their complex relationships with sites, Rothman focuses on locals and how the coming of a tourist-based economy looked to them. "A view of tourism from the perspective of the visited," Rothman suggests, "highlights a different set of relationships" (p. 21). He's right. For one thing, it makes the history of tourism in the West into a story that is less cultural and more structural.

Though the book is filled with cultural insights, *Devil's Bargains* is mostly about the economic, social, and political consequences that flow from choosing tourism as an economic base. As the title indicates, Rothman argues that choosing tourism has usually been a "devil's bargain," a process whereby locals sold their souls (or, increasingly, lost them is hostile corporate takeovers) for economic rewards that turned out to be mixed at best. As importantly, Rothman's focus on locals allows him–perhaps forces him–to complicate local identity itself. Indeed, the crucial set of actors that emerges from Rothman's story are the "neonatives," a category Rothman uses to good effect to describe those who came to particular Western places because of their tourist economies and transformed themselves into locals. Existing on a wide spectrum between the impossibly pure extremes of local and tourist, neonatives were the crucial actors in making the shift to tourism. And, ironically, they were also among the most vocal defenders of places being standardized and overwhelmed by tourist development. Though Rothman sees tourism as a colonial process, and explicitly places his analysis within a long historiographical tradition of seeing the West as an economic province of the East, one of his most compelling achievements may be in muddying the distinctions between colonizer and colonized.

Devil's Bargains is less a comprehensive survey of tourism in the American West than it is a series of case studies designed to support Rothman's developmentalist model. Three phases of development, Rothman argues, have defined tourism in the twentieth-century West. First, there was what Rothman refers to as the "tourism of hegemony," an upper class variant, coming out of the nineteenth century, that defined the tourist experience in terms of cultural uplift. By the end of World War One, the centrality of this cultural or heritage tourism, which was reliant upon rail travel and grand destination hotels, was challenged by a recreational brand of tourism made possible by the automobile and improved roads. In this second phase, middle class Americans stormed the custodial barricades of the tourism of hegemony and embraced instead an individualistic model of Western tourist travel. The coherent iconography of a scenic and mythic West splintered, Rothman argues, as Americans gained the ability to define tourism on their own terms. Finally, after World War Two, entrepreneurs developed a model of entertainment tourism that engulfed the first two phases, producing a malleable variant of tourism based more in ever-changing unreality than in the authentic West that had defined cultural and, to a lesser extent, recreational tourism.

These three phases were paralleled by a generalizable series of changes in economic organization and demography. Many of the West's premier tourist towns–places like Jackson Hole, Santa Fe, Sun Valley, and Aspen–were stagnant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the victims of the declining fortunes of extractive economies. Rothman is careful not to romanticize the pre-tourism pasts of these towns. Their initial transformations into tourist towns were often accomplished by cultural entrepreneurs who saw these areas as offering unique experiences and sought to freeze them in time while simultaneously sprucing them up. These entrepreneurs, folks like Edgar Hewett in Santa Fe and Walter Paepcke in Aspen, were not immune to the financial rewards of tourism, but they were generally more interested in preserving (creating, actually) unique places designed to serve the cultural needs of outsiders. Authenticity was the key feature of such places, to be coaxed to the surface but always studiously protected from the motives of crass commercialism. The "realness" of places like Santa Fe, defined largely in terms of tourist expectations, had to be designed as a "look," while elements that subverted tourist expectations, or made tourists too aware of the transformative impacts of their presence, had to be carefully controlled and segregated. Spaces like Santa Fe were "scripted," to use Rothman's term, by these early entrepreneurs–through artifice they were made to seem real.

The recreational phase of tourism involved both the democratization of the tourist experience and, in many cases, a more overt and problematic commercialism. Rothman focuses on developments in and around the national parks to illustrate this phase. Automobility made spatial control of the tourist experience more difficult to achieve, and one result was that locals had an easier time making a buck from the out-of-towners. Such commercialization came to threaten the scripted authenticity of tourist sites, and the control of the cultural entrepreneurs, by catering to the mass tastes of travelers. Where Progressive Era tourism in the West was didactic, tourism during the interwar years became, thanks to the automobile, much more experiential.

As tourism's economic potential emerged more clearly, particularly in the years after World War Two, corporations made a play for control, challenging the neonative sense of localism in Western tourist towns, proletarianizing the industry, and manufacturing a new brand of entertainment tourism that was increasingly detached from the West as a place. Here, Rothman uses Las Vegas as the supreme example of this postmodern, corporatized form, though he also shows it at work in the West's ski towns. By the 1990s in many of these places, the very local and neonative constituencies who had opted for an economic future based in tourism found themselves dispossessed or marginalized by corporate capital, wealthy outsiders, and low-wage workers. In laying out this structural model of tourist development in the West, Rothman provides a provocative template for analyzing the region's history in the twentieth century.

The book's focus on case studies is both a strength and a weakness. Rothman provides fascinating and authoritative portraits of Southwestern tourism in the early twentieth century, the development of skiing and ski towns in the intermountain West, and the rise of gaming in Las Vegas, to name but the most prominent examples. These portraits are detailed and exhaustive, supported by considerable primary research. They are the historical meat of the volume, and historians interested in these particular subjects will find *Devil's Bargains* required reading. But these case studies can subsume the broader themes of the book, making it seem at times less a history of Western tourism than a history of skiing and gaming. There are also significant sections of the West–the Great Plains, California, the Pacific Northwest–that go all but unmentioned in *Devil's Bargains.* Finally there are areas in which Rothman might have pushed his analysis. For instance, though it is often lingering in the background, Rothman could have said much more about connections between nature and tourism, for his analysis hints at ways in which the two in combination have powerfully affected American environmental sentiment. If *Devil's Bargains* has weaknesses–and it does–they are usually provocative ones, for they challenge historians to think of other case studies, themes, and regional variants and how well they fit Rothman's interpretive model. *Devil's Bargains* is important not because it is the last word on Western tourism, but because it is a bold interpretive model and a departure point for a conversation about tourism that is sure to be a central part of Western History in the years to come.

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