



**David Bernstein.** *How the West Was Drawn: Mapping, Indians, and the Construction of the Trans-Mississippi West.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. 324 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8032-4930-1.

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**Published on** H-Environment (April, 2020)

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In *How the West Was Drawn: Mapping, Indians, and the Construction of the Trans Mississippi West*, David Bernstein argues that Native Americans were central to the cartographic production of the American West and thus instrumental agents in the process of American state building. Bernstein refutes the idea that Native Americans were passive receivers of American colonialism as he situates westward expansion within the multidimensional, lived world of geopolitical negotiation. This work focuses heavily on Native/US land negotiations that took place in the early nineteenth century, drawing attention primarily to US exchanges with the Pawnees, Iowas, and the Lakota of the Great Plains that demonstrate tactful spatial negotiations carried out by the tribes. In doing so, Bernstein challenges the dominant belief among scholars of cartographic history that “indigenous territorial constructs were incompatible with Euro-American cartographic conventions” (p. 18).

Recent scholarship in the humanities has identified Euro-American cartography as instrumental to colonial projects in the Americas and elsewhere. Critical geographers such as Edward Said, Michael De Certeau, Doreen Massey, and others have written extensively about the metaphysical and ideological underpinnings of Western-style mapping, pointing to the ways in which maps are mechanisms of power that assert an understanding of

space as a surface—inert and absolute—that can be crossed, conquered, and divided into territories. According to these scholars, “maps have been used almost exclusively as tools of oppression,” and the process of mapping US territory should therefore be recognized as central to the process of American colonialism and the continued, systematic erasure of Native Americans (p. 7).

The history of mapmaking in the American West thus often reveals and is understood as the conflict between two opposing spatial imaginaries: the scientifically oriented and abstract Western one (portrayed in dominant modes of mapping), and an indigenous spatial understanding grounded in the lived experience. In *How the West Was Drawn*, Bernstein contends arguments grounded in this spatial binary and attempts to unearth the hidden complexities underlying the mapping process of the trans-Mississippi West. In doing so he asserts that, contrary to popular assumption, “Indians were central to the cartographic creation of the trans-Mississippi United States” (p. 3). Rather than viewing the mapping of this region, as many scholars have, as the overlaying of one metaphysical conception of space upon another (as arising out of the conflict between two distinct spatial worldviews), Bernstein situates “American expansion within a wider set of lived circumstances” (p. 12).

Through exploring examples of nineteenth-century maps of the Pawnee and Siouan peoples that were used in large part to communicate territorial space to US officials, Bernstein points out important similarities revealed within and through the discursive space of mapping. The maps and exchanges explored in the book's early chapters suggest that Pawnee and Siouan peoples expressed, albeit differently, clearly understood territorial claims. Perhaps most poignant is Bernstein's example of an 1844 meeting between Pawnee chief Sharitarish and American Lt. Henry Carleton, where the Pawnee chief illustrates his own interpretation of the geopolitical and topographical landscape extending the Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska Rivers. This spatial representation (a map drawn in the dirt of a Pawnee lodge that marked, with precision, territories of neighboring tribes) surprised Carleton, according to Bernstein, both because Sharitarish was able to "relay geographic information in a way [he] understood," but also because he did so "with a talent that was exceptional even among Americans" (p. 18).

Of central importance to Bernstein are the negotiations that this shared discursive/cartographic space made possible for Native tribes who were using territorial concessions as a means of adapting to a rapidly changing world and asserting their own geopolitical agency. For example, the 1833 treaty between the Pawnees and the United States, which resulted in the Pawnee ceding their land in exchange for "goods, mediation, and the promises of protection" from the United States military, was, according to Bernstein, an "astute political tactic" that played a significant role in "how the West was drawn" (p. 74). The Pawnees maintained a unique geopolitical position throughout the nineteenth century as they posed one of the greatest obstacles for western migration. Taking this into consideration when revisiting the 1833 treaty reveals not only Pawnee participation in the negotiation of spatial boundaries but also their use of geopolitical placement (especially among chiefs) to protect their people and attain higher status and respect.

This example and others, according to Bernstein, illuminates the process of mapping America as "one of geopolitical negotiation rather than simply a clash of cultures" (p. 10).

In the penultimate section of the book, Bernstein focuses specifically on the cartographic expeditions of Charles Fremont and the rhetoric of Enlightenment superiority at the heart of his expansionist project. Fremont's 1842, 1843, and 1844 expeditions across the Great Plains and onward to California marked the supposed triumph of Enlightenment thought over what was then imagined as an "undefined and uncontrolled Indian Country" (p. 164). It is Fremont's project, above all, that Bernstein associates with the occlusion of Indian participation in the drawing of the Trans-Mississippi West and the establishment of the spatial binary discussed above. As Bernstein writes, Fremont and his supporters' emphasis on scientific instrumentation and the supposed production of a superior cartographic knowledge "became part of a nationalist project that both unified the country and sterilized expansion, turning what appeared violent and unseemly to many Americans into a triumph of Enlightenment thought" (p. 165). In tracing the underlying epistemological binary that has functioned to erase Native Americans as participatory actors to specific projects such as Fremont's, Bernstein exposes dominant colonial narratives of erasure while simultaneously clearing space for reimagining the mapping process.

Bernstein's project poses a critical challenge to the metaphysical/epistemological binary at the heart of many critiques of colonial mapping. He urges scholars to embrace the rather complex human interactions that always underlie cartographic production by highlighting the various roles Native Americans played in the formation of territorial boundaries. In offering this corrective, he restores a certain spatial power to Native peoples that could be influential in projects seeking to reclaim and remap Native spaces, not just in the trans-Mississippi West, but throughout North

America. Recognizing Native peoples as instrumental to the mapping process illuminates the possibilities for rewriting this spatial history and for being more inclusive of alternative imaginaries in the future. It does not, however, restore justice to groups experiencing ongoing genocide and spatial control, and it does not repair the damages of settler colonialism that inarguably fueled the complex process of mapping he here illuminates. We must not forget, as Bernstein reminds us throughout this work, that even the most astute geopolitical tactics on the part of Native groups were always already conditioned by the pressures of encroaching colonial forces.

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**Citation:** Christopher Lamb. Review of Bernstein, David. *How the West Was Drawn: Mapping, Indians, and the Construction of the Trans-Mississippi West*. H-Environment, H-Net Reviews. April, 2020.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=54749>



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