Frontier Products: 
Tourism, Consumerism, and the 
Southwestern Public Lands, 1890–1990

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Visitors to Arizona’s Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness Area in 1978 crawled out of their air-conditioned Chryslers in the administrative parking lot, stretched their legs, loaded their cameras, and browsed through the federally published tourist brochures that their tax dollars had sponsored. Curious, bored, travel-weary, or simply scenery numb, tourists1 gazing out at the stark desert landscape of Aravaipa Canyon found their wildest western expectations reinforced by the text of the Bureau of Land Management Visitor’s Guide to Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness: “Wilderness is the America that was—wild land beyond the

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frontier that shaped the growth of the nation and the character of its people."\(^2\)

The astute historian will recognize in this bureaucratic prose a venerable historiographic tradition. In 1893 young Frederick Jackson Turner stood before the American Historical Association and proposed a meaning for the American frontier. In his Victorian words, "the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development."\(^3\) For Turner, the frontier, the "meeting point between savagery and civilization," provided the chief influence on the building of the American character. On the frontier, European civilization collided with its wilderness antithesis, producing the new synthesis of American democracy.\(^4\) To the contemporary ear, this poetic invocation rings distinctly racist or at least ethnocentric. The "free land" of the West served as homeland to a multitude of peoples prior to the arrival of Euro-American settlers. From a Hispano or Native American viewpoint, both "savagery" and


\(^4\) Myra Jehlen, in "The Landscape as Totem," Prospects, VI (1981), 17-36, argues that in [Euro-] America this dualistic framework was seen as inherently stable, resolved through transcendence rather than through dialectical synthesis. In Jehlen's view, the dialectic was a European import. This is a fascinating argument, but seems to me less generalizable than Jehlen argues. Certainly Turner's interpretation is cast in a dialectical framework. Given the prevalence of dualistic interpretations of environment and society evinced in Euro-American culture, a cautious, and defensible, reading might suggest that these oppositions have been read/resolved in different fashions at different times (even by the same individual).
“wilderness” were constructed and imported by the newcomers.\textsuperscript{5} Yet Turner’s imaginative dichotomies of civilization and wilderness, free land and settled land continue to impress the popular and institutional imagination and rhetoric.\textsuperscript{6} How to explain this endurance of the Turnerian vision in the face of twentieth-century modernization? How to reconcile the apparent conflict between the Old West and New West, Conestoga and Cadillac, prospector and park ranger, gunbelt and sunbelt?

One might begin with the term “frontier.” Early critics of Turner assailed his imprecise if poetic usage.\textsuperscript{7} Although in-

\textsuperscript{5} The classic study of the intellectual construction of “savagery” remains Roy Harvey Pearce, \emph{Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind} (Rev. ed., Berkeley, 1988). Nearly twenty years ago Francis Jennings, in \emph{The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest} (1975; reprint New York, 1977), pointed out that “European explorers and invaders discovered an inhabited land. Had it been pristine wilderness then, it would possibly be so still today.... [T]here never were such grand absolutes as ‘savagery’ and ‘civilization’” (p. 15). Unfortunately, although unselfconscious use of the savagery/civilization opposition has effectively disappeared from scholarly discourse, its corollary, the wilderness/civilization opposition, remains active. Roderick Nash, in the most recent edition of his influential \emph{Wilderness and the American Mind}, despite his initial discussion of wilderness as cultural artifact, seems to evince a religious faith in the essential reality of wilderness as “diametrically opposed to...civilization” (p. 251). See also Kenneth H. Simonsen, “The Value of Wildness,” \emph{Environmental Ethics}, III (1981), 259-263; John L. Hammond, “Wilderness and Heritage Values,” \emph{Environmental Ethics}, VII (1985), 165-170; and Marvin Henberg, “Wilderness as Playground,” \emph{Environmental Ethics}, VI (1984), 251-263. See Ramachandra Guha, “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique,” \emph{Environmental Ethics}, XI (1989), 71-83, for a trenchant critique of essentialist visions of “wilderness.”


sistent that the American frontier was not a frontier in the European sense of a border between nations, Turner wandered in and out of various operational definitions, veering (more for rhetorical grace than logical rigor) from frontier as place, to frontier as process, to frontier as synonym for the “West.” In 1962 historian Jack Forbes seized upon Turner’s “meeting point between savagery and civilization” as evidence for the reasonable proposition that the frontier had, in fact, been a frontier in the European or anthropological sense of a “place where two groups confront each other,” a place characterized by a process of cultural interaction. Forbes observed that Turner and subsequent frontier historians had simply focused upon the Euro-American “half” of the frontier, effectively conflating Indians and Hispanos with nature and defining the cultural landscapes “beyond” the frontier as undeveloped or free land, thereby legitimating the imperial expansion of the United States.

Reading the frontier as a zone of cultural interaction offers the historian a more precise way of discussing both place and process. It also sheds some interpretive light on the endurance of “frontier” rhetoric and issues in twentieth-century discourse and social relations, what western historian Patricia Limerick calls the “unbroken past of the American West.” In his essay, Forbes noted the persistence of ethnic borders in the twentieth-century West, but we might add another imaginative frontier that still characterizes the region, namely the public lands where Euro-American fantasies of an unoccupied continent continue to find material expression. In the Great Basin and Rocky Mountain region, more than half of all lands remain in the public domain.


The state of Arizona offers a case study in the western blending of modernization, environmentalism, consumerism, and Turnerian mythology. Here, nearly eighty-five percent of all land remains in public or tribal hands, largely "undeveloped," in the most common sense of that word. These "natural" landscapes have preserved a dynamic complex of images associated with the nation's perceived frontier past. The administered boundaries of the parks, monuments, wilderness areas, and forests have carved the wilderness and civilization antinomy into the western landscape and the popular imagination. This imaginative border is reified, celebrated, and occasionally denounced, but all visions appeal to a faith in radical difference, a perception that the "undeveloped" spaces on the far side of the frontier constitute an exotic other, contrasting sharply with the developed urban landscapes of modern America.

Although the vast majority of Arizonans live in urban environments, these cityscapes account for less than seventeen percent of the state's surface area. The development of the urban sunbelt cities with their high-rise skylines and humid golf greens, rather than erasing memories of the "frontier" West, has heightened the sense of contrast with the "undeveloped" desert, the "wild land beyond the frontier," reinforcing the frontier sense of difference and liminality. Consumers cross this percep-

11. Arizona is the sixth largest state in the nation. Seventeen percent of the state's lands are owned by individuals or corporations, twenty-eight percent are in Indian reservations, fifteen percent are held by the U. S. Forest Service, seventeen percent by the Bureau of Land Management, thirteen percent by the state of Arizona, and ten percent are other public lands. These figures are from Arizona Statistical Review, 44th Annual Edition, September 1988 (Phoenix, 1988), 74.

12. Popper, "Strange Case of the Contemporary American Frontier," makes this observation of the western United States as a whole. I have intentionally conflated a variety of differently defined and administered landscapes into "public lands." Although bureaucrats, politicians, activists, and sometimes even the general public distinguish among the legal statuses of parks, monuments, and forests, the complex imagery imaginatively associated with "wild" lands is not so precisely bounded.

tual threshold into the seemingly unstructured space of the public lands and then return to the structured workaday world, rejuvenated by their imaginative recreation of this frontier dialectic. These western landscapes serve as cultural gateways through which the tourist escapes to an idealized other whose presence defines, balances, and, in the end, legitimates modernity.

From Frontier to Playground

Arizona ascended to statehood early in 1912, after the widely publicized “closing” of the frontier, the disappearance of a line of settlement as measured by the United States Bureau of the Census. Much of the early popular literature describing the new state emphasized its nearness to the nation’s mythic frontier past, the regenerative aridity of its climate, and the exotic strangeness of its wide-open, desert spaces. Popular images of Arizona and the West crystallized at a time of national anxiety over the fate of the “American character” and public concern with immigration, industrialization, labor unrest, and the disquieting effects of world war. Essays, travel guides, promotional pamphlets, and popular fiction, all promoted an image of the desert Southwest as the last resort of American exceptionalism, a final haven for the regeneration of the nation’s Anglo-Saxon heritage.

The Grand Canyon dominated this literature. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, convinced of the economic

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potential of the canyon’s scenery, built a spur to the southern rim in 1901. Two years later the Santa Fe, cooperating with Fred Harvey, began construction of a luxury resort hotel, El Tovar, at the line’s terminus. By 1905, the year of El Tovar’s grand opening, Santa Fe promotional pamphlets, sponsored articles, and art work flooded the popular media, inundating American consumers with images of a wild, rugged West, an exotic landscape where vestiges of the American frontier experience yet endured. Harriet Monroe, writing for a 1902 Santa Fe promotional booklet, advised prospective tourists that they could disembark at El Tovar and, in a matter of minutes, “be exploring the wilderness with the pioneers.” Monroe’s Santa Fe sponsored trip to the desert Southwest also resulted in an article placed in the prestigious Atlantic Monthly. There she more explicitly developed her Turnerian conception of the wilderness vacation for the genteel tourist: “To [Arizona] the mind of man must venture as a pioneer; there at last he stands face to face with Nature...measuring intrepidly the stature of his soul with God.” History demonstrated to Monroe the importance of such testing, the conflict of “Man” and the other of “Nature.” In historic America “the weary races of Europe needed renewing


and achieved it in the centuries of conflict with Nature and wild foes.” For modern America, Arizona’s value lay in its preservation of this wilderness dialectic, for “races of men need the wilderness to dream in.”

The Santa Fe’s appeals to “civic-minded men” emphasized nationalism, and in the promotional literature, icons of the frontier—log cabins, stage coaches, Indians—provided photographic evidence that in the desert Southwest urbanites could comfortably cross an imaginative threshold into the mythic past. But the canyon’s utility as a repository of national virtue could not directly inform the masses who could not afford the rail fares and the expense of a vacation stay at El Tovar. This recreative energy had to be mediated before its benefits could trickle down to the general public. Editor William Allen White, visiting the canyon at the invitation of the Santa Fe, set forth this view in an article placed in McClure’s: “The writers, and painters, and preachers, and leaders of thought in the land will visit the place in larger numbers than will persons from the materialistic walks of life.... Through the world’s thinkers the Canyon must speak to the world.”

This vision of a privileged elite serving as mediator between a transcendent truth and the “illiterate” masses, and its corollary faith in the uncommercial, utilitarian nature of that mediation, would never entirely disappear from tourist discourse.

19. Harriet Monroe, “Arizona,” Atlantic Monthly, LXXXIX (June 1902), 781, 782, 788. Monroe’s Turnerian rhetoric suggests that women, as well as men, could find value in dualistic conceptions of nature and culture, and in fantasy of flight across the frontier threshold. See Melody Graulich’s “O Beautiful for Spacious Guys: An Essay on the Legitimate Inclinations of the Sexes,” in Frontier Dream, 186-201. Annette Kolodny, in The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters (Chapel Hill, 1975) and The Land before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860 (Chapel Hill, 1984), finds a dramatically “different voice” in Euro-American women’s perception of the frontier. Vera Norwood and Janice Monk, in the conclusion to their anthology, The Desert is no Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women’s Writing and Art (New Haven, 1987), 233, similarly argue that “women do not value the landscape for its evidence of human domination, nor do they seek places in which they can play out the stereotypically masculine game of victory over the environment.”

Economic affluence, credit buying, and Henry Ford's productive efficiency catalyzed the democratization of travel during the 1920s, however. Mass tourism promised profits to local businesses and a political base to the newly established National Park Service. The Roaring Decade brought thousands of American tourists and their discretionary income to the rugged spaces of the western United States. A variety of competing visions of landscape management alternately denounced and celebrated this explosion of leisure travel, but the appeals to the nation's mythic frontier heritage reached new rhetorical heights. The discourse now accommodated a slightly different vision of the wilderness, moving gradually away from the Darwinian struggle portrayed by Harriet Monroe to a more accessible vision: the frontier as playground.

Automobile tourism found an ardent advocate in Stephen T. Mather, director of the National Park Service. Mather realized that designating landscapes National Parks did not remove them from economic development so much as dictate a particular course of economic development, namely leisure travel and recreation. Tourism offered a means of expanding the agency's hegemony, of ensuring that the agency and its administrative units would survive the political struggles of the decade. Like a rolling snowball, increasing tourism in the National Parks would demand more administrative services, greater budgets, greater agency responsibilities and prestige, and justify more parks which would in turn generate still more tourism.21 Mather led a massive publicity campaign to promote tourist travel to the parks and monuments, a campaign that included an article Mather placed in the American Motorist, "National Playgrounds of the Southwest." The Southwest, said Mather, "has a fascination that appeals to the most prosaic." This fascination derived from the region's numerous "mute reminders of pioneer days and of the even earlier times before civilization first reached this part of the country." The director stressed the accessibility of the

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southwestern parks and monuments and urged visitors to the Grand Canyon to invest in "more than a look into the brilliant depths." The tourist should stretch his or her trip out across days or even weeks, perhaps making an overnight stop at Fred Harvey's Phantom Ranch on the canyon floor, and "motor trips of course should be made to numerous vantage points on the rim."  

Mather's friend, Robert Sterling Yard, founder of the National Parks Association, devoted his group's first publication to the Grand Canyon, reiterating Mather's insistence on longer tourist visits. Slowing the tourist down and encouraging longer stays (and thus greater expenditures) would lead, claimed Yard, to "better comprehension and enjoyment" of this national treasure. It would also lead to increased profits for those businesses servicing the tourist and, so went the hope, increase public support for the National Park Service and its mission. A similar missionary zeal energized the prose of Frank Pinkley, superintendent of the Southwest Monuments. Pinkley expounded a blatantly nationalistic vision, describing the monuments as those places "Where History Was Made." Pinkley enthusiastically participated in Mather's sales campaign and claimed that the National Park Service, in the southwestern monuments, would teach "Mr. John Doe...a sort of nationalism which puts him on guard to defend his country against the internal enemies which are so insidious in trying to preempt


the public property for private gain."24 Here nationalism, expressed through preservation of the country's cultural heritage, obscured and even denied the very real economic component of preservation, the expenditure of discretionary income on the multifarious and diffuse service industries that made tourism possible.

The frontier playground could be sanctified through appeals to spirituality as well as to nationalism. When in 1924 Zane Grey's article, "What the Desert Means to Me," appeared in American Magazine, more than two million readers could thrilled to the former dentist's contention that "the desert is a reality. It casts an actual spell." This spell had much to do with the regional preservation of the atavistic qualities of the "progenitors of the human race." In an increasingly urban and decadent age, "all these places of the desert with their loneliness and silence and solitude awake the instincts of the primitive age of man."25 The use of gender here is significant. The exotic other of Grey's wilderness was quintessentially masculine, virile, and savage, defined by idealistic opposition to its implied counter referent—domesticated, effeminate, urban America. The novelist later reduced this formula to its essential components: "The West was young, virile, open," located on the safe (i.e., western) side of the geographic "threshold of decadence."26

In January 1924, writing of a trip to the Rainbow Bridge for Ladies Home Journal, Grey made this geocultural dichotomy explicit: "the world of men, and of women, of strife and greed, of hate and lust, of injustice and sordidness, the crass materialism and the aftermath of the Great War, the rush and fever and ferocity of the modern day with its jazz and license and blindness—these were not here." On one side of Grey's frontier stood the materialism, conflict, and chaos of civilization; the "other" side harbored the spirituality, harmony, and liberating solitude of the wilderness. In the shadow of the Rainbow Bridge itself, Grey waxed mystically spiritual, proclaiming that "not

among men do I feel these things." 27 A few pages deeper into this issue of *Ladies Home Journal*, readers could find William Lyon Phelps’s "The Voice in the Wilderness: Second in the Series of Observations on the New Testament." Creative editorial juxtaposition allowed readers to turn from Grey’s antisocial pantheism to Phelps’s Christian contention that "the solitude of the wilderness is not like the solitude of a cell," and his reminder that "John the Baptist was a lonely, hairy man...[who] lived in the solitude of the desert." 28 Thus could the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant citizens of Middletown find scriptural sanction for their vacations in Arizona.

Between 1917 and 1925, Zane Grey never left the best-seller list. 29 His books, largely set in the desert wilds of the Southwest, were usually serialized in the slicks, and his essays and narrative articles appeared during those rare intervals when he did not have a novel in production. In addition to this prosaic flood, Grey was part-owner in a movie company filming his frontier novels on location in Arizona. 30 In later years, the western landscape retained the imaginative impress of these images, ghostly traces of their passage filling the great empty spaces that so fascinated the tourist. Ironically, Grey’s effectiveness as popularizer undoubtedly contributed to the development that he abhorred, bringing the jazz, din, and chaos of modernity to the red rock country.

Additional voices lamented the “motorization” of the wilderness, the disappearance of a genuine other untainted by modernity. In 1925 a young forester, Aldo S. Leopold, demanded that the federal government preserve and protect those virgin remnants of the desert Southwest not yet violated by the Good

30. Candace C. Kant, *Zane Grey’s Arizona* (Flagstaff, 1984), chap. 9. See also Carlton Jackson, *Zane Grey* (Rev. ed., 1989), especially chaps. 8 and 9. Grey was but one of many western writers and filmmakers broadcasting Arizona’s landscapes to middle America. Tom Mix filmed dozens of western movies in the rugged country near Prescott, Arizona, and John Ford impressed the skyline of Monument Valley on the popular imagination with a series of movies, beginning in 1934. The southern Arizona movie set of Old Tucson continues this tradition and has become a tourist attraction in its own right.
Roads Movement. In an article in *Sunset* magazine, “Conserving the Covered Wagon,” Leopold proffered the example of an Arizona farmer who had voluntarily left a symbolic portion of his farm unreclaimed, a sandy desert legacy for his sons as a “sample of what [he had] made the farm out of.” Leopold claimed this farmer was bequeathing more to his children than a piece of real estate. This small section of desert represented a “Romance written upon the oldest of all books, the land. The Romance of the March of Empire.” Leopold suggested that the American public pay a similar land tithe and dedicate a portion of the roadless lands to preservation of the “wilderness frontier,” areas where “the Covered Wagon blood could disport at will.” After all, what would happen to the distinctive American character if urbanization destroyed the environment in which that character had evolved? Preserving the wilderness would preserve racial memories of the frontier experience and thus preserve American exceptionalism as well. The arid lands harbored the last resort of rugged individualism, a final chance to salvage a physical bridge to the nation’s frontier past: “round this last little remnant of the original Southwest lies an economic empire without any wilderness playground or the faintest chance of acquiring one.”

Playground, as Leopold used the word, intended no pejorative associations. The playing he envisioned was ruggedly individualistic stuff, not the emasculated urban variety. We need to learn the true meaning of the “Winning of the West,” declared Leopold, and “if we think we are going to learn by cruising around the mountains in a Ford, we are largely deceiving ourselves.” America needed statutorily designated primitive areas wherein the sons and daughters of the pioneers could recreate the frontier experience. Meanwhile, countless joyously self-deceived Americans cruised through the deserts in their Fords, many of them doubtless inspired by Leopold’s article to see the wilderness before it was destroyed by other tourists, their pathfinding eased by the detailed road map that appeared

in *Sunset* magazine. *Sunset* readers who flipped past Leopold’s assault on the motorization of the desert discovered Walter V. Woehlke’s “Transcontinental Motor Trails of the Far West—I. Southwestern Highways,” which lauded the democratic mass mobilization of the tourist and reminding his restless, work-bound audience that “The Open Road is Calling.”

As the decade pushed on, it became increasingly difficult to overlook the transformation of Arizona from a rural state to an urban state. Interpreters of the region grappled uneasily with this convergence of Old West and New West, but writers as diverse as Lawrence Perry and Mary Austin espied an essential continuity of experience in the arid lands. Most tourists might be anxious about their workaday lives back home, but they were not especially worried that the region’s unique landscapes would disappear overnight. The native Chicagoan or Philadelphian need only gaze out at the view from the porch of El Tovar for reassurance that corners of the nation remained unpaved and untamed.

The shift from frontier to playground did not erase the regenerative otherness of the western lands, could not deny the continuance of an environment radically different from that to which most easterners were accustomed. Here, as Lawrence Perry observed, persisted “country such as an Easterner beholds only in dreams.” The national forests and parks ensured the endurance of the frontier wilderness and maintained the western dreamscapes in a condition that safeguarded their distinctiveness. The juxtaposition of irrigated agricultural fields and resort lawns with unreclaimed desert heightened the striking frontier contrast between humid “development” and arid “preservation.” This differentiation, this perception of otherness and the cultural associations it suggested to the tourist, provided a field

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34. Lawrence Perry, “Rear Platform Impressions of the Southwest,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, LXV (March 1919), 266; Mary Austin, “Arizona: The Land of Joyous Adventure,” *The Nation*, CXVI (April 4, 1923), 386-388. Goldie Weisberg, in “Panorama: Phoenix, Arizona,” *American Mercury*, XVII (May 1929), 102, declared that despite the overlay of desert “frontier” by “playground,” “there is a flavor and a quality in it that no amount of organizing, standardizing, and boosting can pillage for the shrines of bigger and better gods.”
35. Perry, “Rear Platform Impressions of the Southwest,” 266.
for the free play of consumer imagination, for recreation legitimated by metaphysical appeals to nationalism, aestheticism, and spirituality.

The Case of the National Monuments

In 1928 tourist Paul A. Ewing, writing for Sunset magazine, observed that the new Chiricahua National Monument was yet "another of those National Monuments which cluster so numerously in Arizona as almost to make the state a National museum."36 During the New Deal years federal aid infused money and personnel into the public lands, developing and publicizing the national parks, monuments, and forests, building roads, printing brochures, educating the public, promoting tourism, and enhancing the federal government's role as conservator of the national heritage. With increasing bureaucratization and centralization came preservation of the frontier threshold and the construction of imaginative gateways to the mythic past and idealized conceptions of nature. This "modernizing" impulse improved the production, marketing, and consumption of perceived antidotes to modernity, including wilderness, primitivism, and rugged individualism.

The national monuments in the Southwest during the New Deal years provide a fascinating example of this process. While such parks as the Grand Canyon preserved "Nature" in the capitalized abstract, the monuments contained "representative sites which...exemplify concretely the glorious past and present of our nation." Frank Pinkley, superintendent of the monuments in the Southwest, found new funding for his agency in the New Deal era, picking up CCC, CWA, WPA, and PWA labor and dollars in 1933 and '34.37 Pinkley and his staff inundated the local media with publicity: between 1930 and 1945 over two

37. Dale S. King, ed., Arizona's National Monuments, Southwestern Monuments Association Popular Series, No. 2 (Santa Fe, 1945), v-vi. On Pinkley and the NPS, see Hal Rothman, Preserving Different Pasts: The American National Monuments (Urbana and Chicago, 1989), esp. 159-186. Rothman argues that tension between Pinkley and NPS Director Horace Albright manifests a schism between "individualism" and "professionalism," Pinkley representing a last vestige of rugged individualism in the NPS. Rothman's contention that Pinkley's influence waned during the 1930s may be true of agency politics, but with the local and vacationing public, Pinkley's influence was at its height in these years.
dozen articles on the national monuments in Arizona appeared in the booster pages of *Arizona Highways*. Park Service staff also worked closely with local civic organizations, delivering speeches at Rotary Clubs, giving radio talks, and conducting tours for local chambers of commerce. The creation in 1937 of the Southwestern Monuments Association facilitated more publicity and patronage.

The Association’s press releases, written, according to the Association, “not so much to encourage travel as to set down a coherent and fairly complete story of each are for the perusal of the many readers of Southwesterniana,” emphasized the new accessibility of the mythic past and the scenic splendor of the sites while valorizing their official status. Unit superintendents or custodians contributed many of the pieces, and in those written by journalists, interviews with rangers or other members of officialdom figured prominently. Portraits of uniformed park rangers bordered photographs of Indian ruins, spectacular desert scenery, Indian “chiefs,” Spanish missionaries, and Anglo pioneers, recreating in celluloid the frontier dichotomy of civilization and “savagery.” In these photographs the officials appeared thoroughly modern and competent, all of them young and vigorous, all of them Anglo males, their faces clean-shaven and reassuringly professional beneath their snap brim “Mountie” style hats.

According to Pinkley (his staff called him “Boss”), the uniform “can build morale and prestige, morale in the man who wears it and prestige in the eyes of the public.”

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38. These are conveniently collected in *Arizona’s National Monuments*.


militaristic professionalism gained from their juxtaposition in the magazines with photographic icons of the mythic past. They also improved the attractiveness of the monuments to the general public, certifying their “official” status. Pinkley claimed that a new parking lot at Montezuma’s Castle “not only adds much in orderly parking and convenience, but in neatness of appearance. It gives a “Government owned” appearance to the place.” Modern parking lot and prestigious uniform marked the site off from the chaos of modernity and certified its otherness; the site in turn conferred the legitimacy of the “glorious past” on the Park Service present. The modern and premodern thus provided mutual contrast, definition, and legitimacy.

The professional bureaucrat at the “Government owned” facility, whatever his (or more rarely, her) institutional title, played complementary roles as promoter, tour guide, administrator, and local representative of federal authority. “Boss” Pinkley, still looking to teach “Mr. John Doe a new sort of nationalism,” saw the interpretive function as the monument’s primary mission. In the monument newsletter, the Southwest Monuments Monthly Report, Pinkley reprinted an article by University of Wisconsin President Glenn Frank entitled “Salesmen of Knowledge.” In July 1934 Arizona monument employees read “Dr. Frank’s” manifesto: “The future of America is in the hands of two men—the investigator and the interpreter.... The practical value of every social invention or material discovery depends upon its being interpreted to the masses.” Chester A. Thomas, custodian at Bandelier National Monument, reiterated the importance of the Park Service as a mediatory agency: “With almost 17,000,000 people coming yearly under the spell of the unspoiled wilderness and the scenes of great drama of our advancing culture, we can exert a powerful influence for good upon our national life.”

Pinkley and his staff exerted this force through “educational contacts” with the traveling public, over 170,000 such contacts in 1934 alone. The “Boss” declared in 1936 that “I would like

42. Ibid., April 1933, p. 9.
43. Glenn Frank, “Salesmen of Knowledge,” in ibid., July 1934, p. 42. Compare this with the quote from William Allen White, above.
44. Chester A. Thomas in ibid., Feb. 1941, 113.
to have our men in the lead when it comes to making a serious study of visitors,” and the Southwestern Monuments Association embarked on a series of detailed and relatively sophisticated visitation studies, examining everything from group size and length of stay to the rate and direction of traffic flow though the monument museums. New directional signs on the highways led visitors over new roads (“placing directional signs...is one of the best things for direct public service we have done in a long time”), the new roads often built with assistance from owners of local roadside businesses. The Museum of Northern Arizona and the Flagstaff Chamber of Commerce donated a new road at Wupatki National Monument to facilitate both archeological excavations and tourist travel. According to museum employee Lyndon Hargrave, “the attendance this coming year should be much higher,” due to the publicity from the “dig.” Increased attendance meant more “educational contacts” and more opportunities for “Boss” Pinkley and his staff to indoctrinate the masses.

According to William Supernaugh, head ranger at Organ Pipe National Monument, this pedagogical role of the Park Service addressed “one of the major problems of recreational conservation,” the potential conflict between the goal of resource preservation and the needs of the population to enjoy those resources. “To solve the problem of ‘protection versus use,’ ” explained ranger Supernaugh, “we must inject the word ‘intelligent.’ Intelligent use...requires that the people, as well as the officials who administer and care for it, must exercise every possible means of preserving the natural relationships within the area.” Intelligence implied a certain elitism, a subtle transcendence of mere tourism and denigration of the popular (and classist) image of hurried sightseeing in which the traveler acquired a superficial, inauthentic understanding of place and past.


Jack Cotter, custodian at the Tuzigoot National Monument between Flagstaff and Prescott, exploited this concept as an “ice-breaker” for greeting new visitors. “All right, say it’s your first visit,” custodian Cotter would tell the traveler, “let us take a quick look, tourist fashion, about the museum and ruins, then drop back by means of the archeological record, into the real story of Tuzigoot.” Possession of the “real story” allowed the visitor to break out of the typical “tourist fashion” comprehension of place and ascend to a higher plane of leisure experience. By participating in the Park Service education program, the tourist could escape the increasingly pejorative connotations of “tourism” while demonstrating support for the Park Service mission and being socialized into the proper behavior for relating to place and past. Leisure time spent in the national monuments, and the leisure dollars spent travelling to and from, purchased a respectably utilitarian form of self-improvement. Tourism could become a learning experience rather than degenerating into what the Southwestern Monuments Association described as “burn[ing] rubber in idle vacation travel,” a serious transgression of the Protestant work ethic.

Tourists and bureaucrats thus entered into a series of mutually reinforcing behaviors: the Park Service, through its interpretive efforts, conferred respectability on the tourists’ leisure experiences. The tourists in turn provided the clientele and political rationale for agency expansion, to wit, the role of the Park Service in performing the higher mission of education and aesthetic development of the public. Complex as this relationship was, it was not truly dyadic but rather a single point in an entire network of relations concerned with status and social legitimation. National park or monument designation imparted legitimacy to tourist attractions by certifying their


authenticity and social utility, and the sites themselves, or at least their cultural associations, legitimated Park Service activities.\textsuperscript{49} Capital-S Science, in the form of state-certified geologists, naturalists, archeologists, and historians, provided a comfortably “objective” series of “real stories” to ensure that the process would not devolve conspicuously into political opportunism. This fragile web of legitimation, dependent on a series of highly complex and abstract linkages between seemingly unrelated subjects, found its ultimate justification in stylized conceptions of otherness: nature, the ancient past, and glorious history. All individuals and agencies eventually invoked the name of one or more of these deities.

In the national parks, monuments, and forests the tourist could drive to the very edge of the frontier, to the brink of modern industrial society, peer into the certified mysteries of nature and ponder the lessons of glorious past as explained by professional governmental guides. At Montezuma’s Castle National Monument, south of Flagstaff, custodian Earl Jackson advised the visitor that “here, within ten minutes of civilization, you can leave your car at the parking area, and within five minutes of easy walking step into 900 years of forgotten yesterdays.” “Boss” Pinkley seconded Jackson’s description of liminality, claiming that the monument functioned as an imaginative doorway into a “dream of the days when white men were unknown.”\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{49} I do not wish to efface the importance of consumer action in this process. Government officials did not simply construct fascist fairytales and impose them on the passive, consumer masses. Visitor contacts were usually quite brief, the Park Service interpretive staff both well-trained and well-intentioned, and consumers highly resistant to any concepts which clashed too sharply with their preconceptions. Edward M. Bruner and Phyllis Gorfain, in “Dialogic Narration and the Paradoxes of Masada,” Stuart Plattner and Bruner, eds., \textit{Text, Play, and Story: The Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society, 1983 Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society} (Washington, D. C., 1983), 56-79, discuss tourist and interpreter interaction at Masada but argue, as do I, that “authoritative tellings of national stories...enjoy a privileged position: they dominate official performances.... [E]ach authoritative telling of a national story constitutes the power of the state” (p. 59).

\textsuperscript{50} Earl Jackson, “A Visit to Monument Castle,” in \textit{Arizona’s National Monuments}, unpaginated; Frank Pinkley, “Montezuma’s Castle,” National Park Service brochure, circa 1930, DM-16, AZC. This sense of liminality is evident in virtually all of the tourist and Park Service literature. See the Park Service informational brochures collected in box DM-34 to DM-78, AZC. Such interpretive voices reinforced and channelled, rather than created, tourist expectations of differentiation.
Although this function was better managed and more pronounced at a developed park or monument, where icons of authority and modernity such as uniforms and official buildings certified the otherness of the site and heightened the sense of contrast, Pinkley felt that this imaginative quality characterized the entire region. For the newsletter, he approvingly excerpted an essay from Sunset magazine: “Nowhere else in the country do pioneer days seem so close to the present as here in the west.... Perhaps it is because there are so many tremendous stretches of untouched mountainside and forests and deserts that we are constantly reminded of those early day struggles...of the raw frontier.”

Pinkley’s “Salesmen of Knowledge” at Tumacacori National Monument, where PWA monies financed a new mission revival style museum and administrative building, zealously promoted this vision: “the modern building will stand as a memorial to the dauntless spirit of those early men whose vision created a civilization out of the desert.”

Custodian Earl Jackson explained the importance of this “key concept” when interpreting the monument’s past for the enrichment of the visiting public. When asked “Why is Tumacacori a National Monument?,” custodian Jackson smoothly replied that the Spanish mission was “an excellent example of what Spanish colonial enterprise was able to accomplish on a very wild and hostile frontier,” and the custodian’s answer always included an “explanation of how church and state combined to effect the civilizing miracles symbolized by this building.” The continuity of New Deal present with this wondrous past was duly pointed out to the visitor, the mission being “a vivid reminder that our civilization has roots that go very deep.” The National Monument thus acquired the blessing of antiquity. Custodian Jackson’s exegesis benefited from the authority of his freshly pressed uniform, his graduate degree in anthropology, and his personal conviction that the Park Service was “free of politics,”

51. This uncredited excerpt appears in Supplement D of Monthly Report, Feb. 1933.

52. The Nogales Chamber of Commerce contributed both money and services to the improvement of this monument. The quote is from Nogales Chamber of Commerce manager G. R. Michaels’s “Tumacacori, Priestly Monument of the Ages,” Arizona Highways, XI (Feb. 1935), 14-15. See also Louis R. Caywood, “Tumacacori, a Portrayal of Spanish History in Arizona,” in Arizona’s National Monuments, not paginated.
its interpretive role limited to presentation of "unbiased information, without personal opinions."\textsuperscript{53}

This discourse carved the western landscape into civilized and wild, developed and free, present and past, self and other, thereby constructing an abstract image of nature or the glorious past for tourist consumption. Its rhetoric proclaimed utilitarian ends, denied any contamination by commercialism or mythology, and elevated the bureaucrat to the status of high priest. The frontier, far from disappearing, had been preserved as holy relic, marking the liminal border between the profane and the sacred, a threshold crossed in ritualistic fashion by the tourist.

\textbf{The Postindustrial Frontier}

In 1969 Stewart Udall admitted that in postwar Arizona the "frontier attitude still runs strong," but believed that it might be overcome: "there is a value revolution upon us," declared the native Tucsonan, and "because of the special advantages found in Arizona, the state has a real opportunity to lead the nation in espousing the new values which are the keystone of this new crusade." The Arizona politician cited his home state's "natural assets" (including its parks and "spaciousness") as the "special advantages" that could enable Arizonans to transcend the anti-environmentalist legacy of their frontier past.\textsuperscript{54} Udall believed the nation to be in the midst of a revolutionary transition from a popular faith in the utility of "frontier" attitudes to a new morality of "total environmentalism." The new values would emphasize preservation rather than exploitation, harmony rather than discord, spirituality rather than crass materialism. "More and more Americans see," said Udall, "that in this increasingly commercial civilization there must be sanctuaries where commercialism is barred, where...all forms of economic use are completely and permanently prohibited, where every man may enjoy the spiritual exhilaration of the wilderness."\textsuperscript{55}

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\item \textsuperscript{53} Earl Jackson, "The Professional Interpreter of Science," in Erik K. Reed and Dale S. King, eds., \textit{For the Dean: Essays in Honor of Byron Cummings} (Tucson, 1950), 304-305.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Stewart L. Udall, "Towards a Humane Habitat for Man," \textit{Arizona Review}, XVIII (April 1969), 7-10. The quotes are from pages 8 and 10.
\item \textsuperscript{55} \textit{The Quiet Crisis} (1968; reprint, New York, 1970), 137. Udall's perception of a visible transition in American environmental thought has been more
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Postindustrial Arizona did indeed seem remote from the “frontier” as it was commonly envisioned. Most Arizonans lived in urban environments, and by 1960 manufacturing and tourism had overtaken mining and agriculture as the state’s leading industries. Federally sponsored hydroelectric projects and paved highways inscribed a new text of social relations on the desert palimpsest. Yet the new values, despite the “post frontier” rhetoric, reified the Turnerian wilderness and civilization dualism even as Udall denounced the “frontier attitude.” National Park “sanctuaries” from the cash nexus, protected from the exploitive tendencies of the materialistic sons and daughters of the pioneers, codified this perception of the separateness of humanity and nature. The Wilderness Areas, places where by statutory definition “man is a visitor who does not remain,” sought to preserve an absolute other on the far side of the urban/wild frontier. The new discourse stridently proclaimed the sanctity of the other, occasionally seeming to shift the locus of value from the civilized to the wild side of the frontier, but always maintaining this imaginative division.

The National Park Service reiterated Udall’s insistence on the role of preserved landscapes as “sanctuaries” from the pollution of commercialism, their spirituality untainted by economic activity. Visitor brochures at Grand Canyon National Park in 1955 definitively stated that land within the park system “is retained inviolate from commercial exploitation,” its economic chastity guaranteed by the powers of the industrial state. This description of the commercial innocence of Arizona’s parks helped maintain their imaginative otherness as “undeveloped” or “free” lands, but concealed their market value as consumer commodities. As visitors to the Grand Canyon read the literature systematically explored by Samuel Hays, Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985 (Cambridge, Mass., 1987). See also Clayton R. Koppes, “Efficiency/Equity/Esthetics: Towards a Reinterpretation of American Conservation,” Environmental Review, XI (1987), 127-146.


57. Grand Canyon National Park pamphlet, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1955, in DG-12, AZC.
asserting the "inviolate" purity of the park, the Arizona Highway Department (with the cooperation of the NPS) counted and interviewed them, and reported their cash value to the state of Arizona. The Highway Department's Grand Canyon Travel Survey of 1955 quantified the market value of Grand Canyon National Park: "The 229,300 car parties to the Grand Canyon in 1954 spent an estimated $117,000,000 on the trips that included the Park in their itineraries. They spent approximately $18,950,000 in the State of Arizona, of which $10,700,000 was spent in the defined vicinity of the park."\(^\text{58}\) In addition to these expenditures on services and products, "Arizona received about $127,000 and the federal government $50,000 in gas tax revenue from this single area of travel." The survey concluded that the Grand Canyon's "economic area of influence is indicated as being 300 miles or less by highway from either rim."\(^\text{59}\) Despite the spiritual rhetoric, the value of Grand Canyon National Park as a consumer commodity could be both quantitatively measured and spatially anchored.

In the postwar consumer society, the wide open spaces beckoned seductively to affluent, white Americans searching for an improved quality of life. Business owners, vacationers, and retirees increasingly oriented toward "amenities," those often intangible qualities that comprised the "western lifestyle," found escape from the crowded, polluted, and stressful landscapes of home in the otherness of western public lands.\(^\text{60}\) Arizona's Development Board, promoting industrial and population growth, invested in campaigns broadcasting desert landscapes to midwestern consumers: "People like to work where it's fun to live!" declared the board's advertisements.\(^\text{61}\) Motorola, relocat-

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58. State of Arizona, Arizona Highway Department, Division of Economics and Statistics, Grand Canyon Travel Survey, 1955, 6, in the Special Collections, University of Arizona Library, Tucson. This archive is hereinafter cited as UASC.

59. Ibid., 6, 25.


61. Arizona Development Board, Year End Report, 1955-1956, 24, UASC. This campaign, sponsored by the Board's Industrial Development Division, sought to
ing one of its major plants in Arizona, advertised for new white-collar employees: “Phoenix is a new frontier,” claimed the ads. “For weekend drives and vacations, we have our choice of the most colorful mountains, canyons, and Indian country in the world...[.] more National Parks and Monuments within a half a day’s drive than anywhere else in the world.”62 The state-sponsored Arizona Highways magazine brought turquoise skies and warm red-rock to readers languishing through the black-and-white winters of the frostbelt. Arizona is the “Land of Room Enough and Time Enough,” declared the magazine’s editorial header.63 By the late 1960s more than half of all new in-migrants to Arizona reported that abundance of “amenities,” and not job availability, motivated their move. Amenity-orientation may have been especially visible in Arizona, but this was neither a strictly local phenomenon nor confined to such resort centers as Palm Springs and Aspen. By the 1970s “wilderness counties,” counties containing or adjacent to federally designated wilderness, were among the fastest growing in the nation.64

A study conducted in 1970 by the University of Arizona’s Division of Economic and Business Research observed that a variety of amenities attracted that state’s new in-migrants and tourists. The researchers concluded that “principal among these attractions are the six national monuments and one national


memorial administered by the National Park Service." Moreover, of the visitors interviewed during the 1967–1968 season, "not all of these seem to be refugees from the snow and ice of colder climes but many seem also to be refugees from the pollution and overcrowding of California." As with the Grand Canyon Survey of 1955, the researchers confidently quantified the market value of one particular "amenity" developed by "Boss" Pinkley and his "Salesmen of Knowledge": "In recent years the total direct impact of Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and its visitors on the regional economy...has been in excess of three-quarters of a million dollars per year.... If a multiplier effect is applied, the total impact on the economy of Southern Arizona and Northern Sonora undoubtedly exceeds one million dollars." In addition to the monument's $170,000 annual payroll, more than seventeen percent of the money spent by overnight visitors was spent "within the Monument boundaries." 

If former Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall declined to assign a monetary value to the "spiritual exhilaration of the wilderness," boosters, business researchers, and thousands of migrating Americans proved less fastidious. Often, however, this economic component of preservation remained hidden beneath the spiritual rhetoric of the "new" values. Udall defined economic use in narrow fashion, focusing on production-oriented industries, especially those associated with the Euro-American side of the nineteenth-century frontier, such as mining, logging, and city building. This rhetoric successfully effaced the endurance of the frontier and its new consumer-oriented industries of travel, tourism, backpacking, publishing, and other forms of wilderness appreciation. The Turnerian vision of western landscapes as free or undeveloped increasingly depended upon denial of the economics of wilderness preservation. Ironically, construction of otherness and successful promotion of the West

66. Ibid., 20.
as commodity rested upon this denial, on imaginative appeals to "nonmaterial" values.

In 1954 University of Arizona research economist John Shirer lamented the current state of literature promoting the beauty of Arizona. Said Shirer, "To a layman such as this writer, most travel brochures have a saccharine staleness." A possible solution, however, could be imagined: "Already living in the Southwest are many highly qualified photographers, artists, and writers. Is it too idealistic to imagine that local talent could, if given the opportunity, create something new in the field of travel promotional 'literature'?" 68

That year one of Tucson's newest celebrities, Joseph Wood Krutch, released his second major work on the desert Southwest, *The Voice of the Desert.* 69 Although Shirer apparently did not consider this Book-of-the-Month-Club selection to be promotional literature, and Krutch would have shrunk in horror from the idea, few individuals in the 1950s did as much to publicize the desert as a liveable, regenerative environment. 70 Krutch's career as accidental booster, his unhappiness with Tucson's urban expansion, and his celebration of a desertine nature unspoiled by human hands exemplified "environmentalist" currents in postwar Arizona and the United States generally. For some consumers, his writings epitomized the transcendence of the American frontier experience, 71 but the former drama

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71. Thomas J. Lyon, in "Beyond the Frontier Mind," in Judy N. Lensink, ed., *Old Southwest, New Southwest: Essays on a Region and its Literature* (Tucson, 1987), 119-130, argues that Krutch's desert works manifest what Lyon calls the "post-frontier mind," a "mind" that has progressed beyond the "frontier mind," the latter embodying a "Christian-Greek-Cartesian-Lockean [sic] dualistic outlook." Paul Bryant, in "Nature Writing and the American Frontier," in *Frontier Experience and the American Dream,* 205-216, notes that "the tradition of landscape as picture has been preserved, and even made official by the Park Service," but claims that Joseph
critic’s texts repeatedly emphasized the separateness of humanity and nature, unselfconsciously reiterating the wilderness and civilization dichotomy. Here again, the locus of value remained the frontier, the meeting of sensitive “man” with unspoiled desert, a mystical dialectical synthesis: “the balance of nature.”

In the summer heat of Tucson, Krutch remained in his air-conditioned custom home, some twelve miles from the city itself, gazing through his window at the biological drama of the desert. But the best of the desert’s “mysteries,” such as the pollination of the Yucca plant, “one can only appreciate fully when the context is remote from the human and as exclusively as possible in that of almost timeless nature.”72 “Timeless nature” existed in the lands beyond the urban pavement. “Human community,” said Krutch, functions as a “sort of sieve” allowing penetration by greater or lesser quantities of “Nature” according to the distance from the urban center—“the fineness of the mesh.” At Krutch’s house, the mesh was “medium coarse,” but “even this close to a city there is some wilderness left.”73

Krutch denounced the empiricist tendency to strip nature of its absolute otherness by reducing it to physical forces. The longtime northeasterner declared that “‘Wilderness,’ ‘jungle,’ [and] ‘desert,’ are not magic words because we have been ‘conditioned’ to find them such but because they stand for things which only conditioning can make seem indifferent or alien.”74 A radical, even mystical, sense of difference accounted for the very real “mystique of the desert.” After a curious rhetorical journey through George Bernard Shaw’s “metabiology,”75 Krutch concludes that “the desert is the ‘last frontier’ …because it was the latest reached, but it is last also because

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Wood Krutch goes “beyond nature as picture to a sense of participation” (pp. 210, 213). Donald Worster, calling Krutch one of the “key figures” in the new “Age of Ecology,” emphasizes Krutch’s communalism. See Nature’s Economy: The Roots of Ecology (San Francisco, 1977), 333-338.

73. Ibid., 187-189.
74. Ibid., 219
it is, in many ways, a frontier which cannot be crossed.” The essential strangeness of the desert forces introspection and “suggests values which more indulgent regions minimize.” Here Krutch returns to the Darwinian testing of Harriet Monroe: “We grow strong against the pressure of a difficulty, and ingenious by solving problems. Individuality and character are developed by challenge,” and “nowhere more than in the desert” did this dialectic manifest itself. In the continuing interaction of “man” and environment, civilization and wilderness, in his characterization of the otherness of the desert landscape and the stages (“fineness of the mesh”) of its development, Krutch embraced the dialectical evolutionary environmentalism that bounded the Turnerian vision of the frontier. He also articulated the corollary theme of American exceptionalism.

...[I]t is a cause for congratulation that the four centuries and more which have passed since Columbus set sail have not been long enough to permit men to take over the whole continent as completely as they took over Europe. And that fact is responsible for an important part of the difference which still exists, spiritually as well as physically, between the Old World and the New. The frontier, so long an important influence on the temper of the American, no longer exists. But...the continent can still boast a spaciousness, a grandeur, a richness and a variety which a European can hardly imagine....

Although many of the public lands were now closed to private entry, their very presence ensured the endurance of the frontier metaphor, and although homesteading may have disappeared from the postindustrial order one could develop the landscape with backpack and pen as well as with pick and shovel. Even as he suggested that the frontier “no longer exist[ed],” Krutch reinscribed it as spiritual essence and consumer commodity.

Fleeing the amenity-scarce frostbelt for the natural abundance of Arizona, the intellectual tourist reenacted the classic masculine, Euro-American dream of flight into purity, of regeneration through testing against environment, the synthesis

76. Ibid., 221.
77. Ibid., 24.
78. Krutch, Grand Canyon, 275-276. I am not suggesting that this is the only, or even primary, theme in Krutch’s work. What is interesting is the repeated use, both explicit and implicit, of frontier metaphor in the work of a thinker commonly associated with the “new” environmental thought in America.
of civilized self and wild other. And, like Leatherstocking Natty Bumpo, Krutch himself prepared the desert for the civilization he had fled. Tucson and Phoenix grew in leaps and bounds during the postwar years, in-migrants such as Krutch filling up the great empty spaces. This growth dismayed the newcomer, who denounced the professional boosterism of the chambers of commerce without ever seeming to realize the irony of his own situation. "One must go farther and farther away to find [nature]," lamented the writer in a 1970 essay. Krutch denied any responsibility for the Sunbelt boom, claiming that he had not been consulted: "Our minds were made up for us by unidentified power groups...whose decisions are often motivated less by any need of the nation than by a desire of those responsible to increase their prestige, guarantee their appropriations, and keep their jobs."79

Edward Abbey, arguably Krutch's successor as foremost environmentalist voice in the West, displayed a more sanguine attitude towards in-migration. Abbey, who grew up in Pennsylvania, confessed that "When Arizona began to grow...it was as much my fault as anyone else's. Like the man and his wife who moved from Des Moines into Phoenix last night, each of us wants to be the last to arrive. Each wants to be the last immigrant."80 Abbey's polemical tirades against "industrial tourism," Glen Canyon Dam, urbanization, and gun control earned him a place on the abrasive edge of radical environmentalism in the 1970s and 1980s. In his essays, books, and novels, Edward


Abbey pushed the Turnerian vision of the wilderness to the wall, asserting not only the radical otherness of the "wild" desert, but also affirming its crucial role in supporting American democracy.81

"Wilderness complements and completes civilization," declared Abbey in *Desert Solitaire*, his first book-length work of nonfiction.82 Reprising Aldo Leopold's plea for preservation of a physical reminder of the nation's frontier past, the former philosophy student contended that "a civilization which destroys what little remains of the wild, the spare, the original, is cutting itself off from its origins and betraying the principle of civilization itself."83 Without preserving some remnant of the originary civilization and wilderness dialectic, America risked devolution into the mechanized tyranny of totalitarianism: "we cannot have freedom without wilderness, we cannot have freedom without leagues of open space beyond the cities."84 The only hope for democratic society, in the face of mechanization, population growth, and social conflict, lay in preserving the radical difference of the wilderness, the other on the far side of the frontier border. There must survive, warned Abbey, an "alternative option," a "radically different mode of being out there, in the forests, on the lakes and rivers, in the deserts.... [W]hat we need in our perishing republic is something different. Something entirely different."85

Despite the force of this dualistic reading of environment, Abbey frequently entertained the notion that civilization in fact subsumed "wilderness," that wilderness was a product, rather than antithesis, of civilization. The former park ranger shifted from assertions of the absolute reality of otherness to suspicions that such difference was socially constructed. When these

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conflicting impulses broke out of their rhetorical containment, he usually cast his lot with otherness, although rarely with the vitalist certainty of Joseph Wood Krutch. "The boundary around a wilderness area may well be an artificial, self-imposed, sophisticated construction," admitted Abbey, "but once inside that line you discover the artificiality beginning to drop away."\(^{86}\) Despite the ambivalence driving his essays, Abbey returned to embrace liminality and urge preservation (or construction) of the frontier boundary between the city and the desert, if only for the pragmatic reason that democracy and human dignity required its imaginative presence: "Balance, that's the secret[,]...the best of both worlds."\(^{87}\)

The frontier synthesis required an other against which to act, a contrasting landscape to define and bound that which was described as self. For Turner, this interaction of self and other produced American democracy through the repeated breaking down and evolutionary rebuilding of social institutions. Production-oriented and extractive industries typified the early stages of this development. By the late twentieth century, consumer-oriented activities had replaced mining and agriculture as leading frontier industries, but the frontier threshold, the border between self and other, remained intact.

In the parks, and especially in the wilderness areas, certain boosters aimed at privileging nature over humanity and civilization, even at transcending what some had come to see as the degrading and destructive heritage of pioneering. Yet it was Euro-American imperialism that removed the original Indian and Hispano residents from vast portions of the West and so allowed its celebration as nature in the pristine abstract; it was the modern state that codified and patrolled the statutory boundaries; it was civilization that generated the images of a nature separate from humanity. The fictive assertion that the parks, monuments, and wilderness areas preserved inviolate a natural state of Edenic grace not only denied the function of these landscapes as consumer commodities, but also implicitly legitimated the imperialist Turnerian vision of the western landscape as "free" land. "Preservation" of socially constructed

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difference reinforced the cultural dominance of modernity, legitimating and facilitating growth, development, modernization, and Euro-American political economy.

Return now to the tourist, where we so precipitously abandoned her in the windswept parking lot of the Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness Area. Every minute of social life, every western movie, Marlboro cigarette advertisement, historical romance, Joseph Wood Krutch essay, Arizona Highways cover, and Sierra Club press release has prepared her for this liminal moment, conditions the consumer's reading of both the landscape beyond the pavement and the inscription in the BLM brochure: "Wilderness is the America that was—wild land beyond the frontier that shaped the growth of the nation and the character of its people." These are lines that could have been written by Edward Abbey, Harriet Monroe, or Frederick Jackson Turner, and it matters little if the tourist has heard these names. The tourist may be an aging Socialist or youthful John Bircher, carrying a styrofoam cooler or a nylon backpack, but the automobile, the parking lot, the posted institutional signs, all provide emblems of modernity with which the desert landscape will be implicitly compared and contrasted as the tourist formulates her own construction of difference.

Return again to Frederick Jackson Turner: "the very fact of the wilderness appealed to men as a fair, blank page on which to write a new chapter in the story of man's struggle for a higher type of society." Modify the gender specificity and verb tense and one finds a passage that would not be out of place in an Earth First! jeremiad. The "very fact" of wilderness, the continuing presence of the frontier other, provides an enduring template upon which Euro-American cultural identity is continually reinscribed, regenerated, and recreated.

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