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**TOURISM, RECREATION, AND THE
FATE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES:
A MIXED BAG**

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Tourism and the Future:

In the twentieth century, tourism has become one of the most important industries in the American West. From Santa Fe to Alaska, from San Antonio to Mt. Rainier, western communities and states depend on the revenue from visitors to sustain local services, develop infrastructure, support schools, and keep taxes low. In many western states, tourism has been the second or third most important source of income throughout the post-World War II period. In Nevada and Hawaii, tourism is the foundation upon which the prosperity of the state economy rests, a reality that increasingly the prospect in New Mexico and Wyoming and has become likely in Idaho, and Montana. Marketing a place and its heritage, natural attributes, or constructed reality has become standard western fare, as typical as the steak and potatoes or biscuits and gravy served across the region

There is an enormous social, cultural, environmental, and economic cost to this embrace. The dance with tourism, which in the West more than spans the twentieth century, reveals the challenges of the post-industrial world: across the sweep of the twentieth century, tourism's combination of promise and threat, of dislocation and relocation, become clear. The history of tourism in the West serves as a blueprint for the future of this most colonized and most mythical region of the nation.

Tourism as a Strategy:

Tourism is the first fully developed form of the service economy, a relatively simple strategy, but a place from which to build to future prosperity in the post-industrial world. It appears to have

marvelous attributes: It seems to solve the boom-bust blues, so consistent a problem for so many places in the West, it puts many — especially unskilled people — to work, and it rarely demands huge investment in infrastructure. Tourism required no special skill of its employees save a willingness to be gracious and attentive. Operators of tourist enterprises rarely require tax abatements, local dollars to support the industry or other givebacks to incoming companies, and the retail trade generated by tourism filled the coffers of most western states with sales tax revenue.

Much of the West is well positioned to develop tourism. Besides being the locus of the American creation myth, it is the scenically most spectacular part of the country, the home to much wilderness, the least physically developed part of the nation, and the location of the best hunting and skiing. Add to that the great natural national parks, and it is hard to top the region. In the West, history and the outdoors are indistinguishable, a real asset as the baby boomers reach retirement as the most affluent group of human beings ever to walk the face of the planet. To them, the West is home to the history that will engage them as they advance in years, home to the scenery that moves them, home to activities that remind them of the travails of their nation as well as of their heartiness as a birth cohort. Tourism appears to be a giant wave, and the West appears to be riding its crest to shore. I wish it were that simple.

Tourism as a Replacement Economy:

As a solution to the social and economic problems of the colonial status inherited from the nineteenth-century West, tourism has vast limitations. The “sink” of economic strategies, the last resort of moribund communities and states, the bottom to which all economies flow, tourism is employed by local leaders as a solution to the problems of places with declining industries. Tourism often became a response to economic desperation. It served as a replacement economy

for declining industries. Viewed through the rosier of lenses, it promised that a community could retain its fabric and character as it brought prosperity.

Unlike traditional industries, which often brought a labor force that became socialized to local norms, tourism came replete with transient newcomers. Labor followed tourism, as did managers and other supervisory personnel. So did neo-natives, people drawn to tourist destinations for their charm and amenities, for their *mise en scene*, who found themselves embracing a fixed moment in local time. The tourists themselves became a strong influence, objects of contempt and gratitude, but harbingers of a range of experience beyond that of most locals. The need for tourists to experience something they defined as real but that they could quickly understand, compelled change. Locals who expected to be who they were became who their visitors wanted them to be; increasingly these purveyors of local service ceased to be local at all. Neo-natives replaced locals, creating the oddly post-modern spectacle of newcomers imitating locals for visitors to give those outsiders what they were paying for: reality as the tourist understood it.

A paradox resulted: local communities that embraced tourism expected that they would be visited by many people but that mostly, their lives would remain the same. They did not anticipate, nor were they prepared for, the ways in which tourism would change them, the rising cost of property in their town, the traffic, the self-perception that the work they did was not important and the diminishing sense of pride in work and ultimately in community, and the tears in the social fabric that followed. Many found selling themselves more complicated than selling the minerals in their ground or the beef raised on their ranches. With diminishing options, tourism was sometimes all there was.

Western tourism typifies the impact of the industry in places that rely on it throughout the world.

With the exception of the belt from Seattle to San Diego, the West remains an economic colony, supported by federal and outside dollars, subject to both extra-regional and intra-regional influences, seeking to assert independence and to control its destiny that finds itself with the economic structure and socio-cultural issues of a colony hardened beyond transfiguration. The structure of these communities and their evolution, the way they utilize transient and semi-permanent labor, and how they constantly become reinvented as new forms of themselves highlights the problems of tourist-based economies.

Tourism as Culture: Selling Identity along with Place

Selling identity has its pitfalls. It commodifies sentiment with experience, melding psychic and physical activities into a unit in which actions and thoughts are inextricably linked.

Western places have an iconography that they share with no other part of the country, a meaning encoded in their very names. Myths, stories, and tales abound; songs even carry this forward. Charlie Daniels' "Wyoming on my Mind" is about a great deal more than Wyoming as a place, more than the geography of the state, more than Wyoming's natural and social attributes.

1) its an elegy for a "real" America we're afraid we've lost, a place where people know their neighbors and wave from their trucks, a place where MTV doesn't set the standards, where people are rooted to place and know what that means, where people connect with their family and their past.

Fixed and Malleable Identities:

It all hinges on identity: that's what western tourism sells. When people visit, they want to

belong, to be of the place if not from it. That's the wrapper to the package, the real reason behind the activity that draws people West. On a horse ride to see a remote place with an Indian guide, the activity of riding, a recreational activity, is really not as important as riding *with an Indian*, as anyone who grew up in the United States knows. Riding is significant, but it's the idea of riding with an Indian that makes it special, even more special than riding with a real cowboy. The act and the participants meld into one experience, which over time causes a shift in how the visited respond. In many situations, the act of conveying a visitor over time persuades the visited to wonder more about what the visitor wants from the experience than what he or she is. In this process, the local identity that people crave becomes subsumed in refracting people into a mirror for themselves — for a price. This act changes the offeror of it more than the offeree, changes the identity of the people of any place, and makes them into something they were not before they put their identity up for sale.

Commerce reveals this pattern as well. The downtowns of tourist towns start by being filled with locally owned business. National chains, many of them resort-based, replace local businesses as tourism takes hold. These stores become ubiquitous, obscuring local business and culture to a traveling public that is seeing just what it saw at home in a different setting, in the process, affirming home, travel destination, and self. This homogenization and increasing uniformity reflect rather than foreshadow transformation. Although the arrival of such businesses illustrates the increased economic importance of tourist communities, it also spells the end of existing cultures. Often this arrival amounts to “Killing the Goose that Laid the Golden Egg.” The inherent problem of communities that succeed in attracting so many people is that the presence of those very people destroys the cultural and environmental amenities that made the place special.

The Fiction of Community:

The approach of tourism frays the bonds of community. The local beneficiaries of tourism come from a small segment of the population, “the growth coalition,” the landowners, developers, planners, builders, real estate sales and management interests, bankers, brokers, and others. The capital that sustains these interests typically comes from elsewhere, changing local relationships and the values that underpin them, along with their vision of place. Others flounder, finding their land their greatest asset and their labor lightly valued. This division creates tension within the boundaries of what most previously regarded as a whole. Ties within communities exist on two levels: actual bonds of connection and agreed-upon fictions of community. In this latter category, people paper over the differences between them in an effort to maintain the semblance of community. They stipulate that their disagreements are matters of conscience and belief that divide people of good character and intent. The embrace of tourism shatters such fictions, pitting different elements against each other, those who stand to benefit from the changes against those whose economic status will be driven downhill as a result. Such tension is not unusual in any kind of community; especially in small tourist or resort towns, the destruction of the fiction that all have the best interests of the community at heart leads to a rending of the social fabric. Those who stand to benefit, the members of the growth coalition, embrace the new, sometimes with terrifying alacrity; those whom this economic change leaves in stasis or decline seethe, resent, and sometimes resist.

These elements band together and develop a range of strategies to halt, slow, deflect, or reverse the changes that tourism brings. A continuum of response among those threatened evolved, taking all forms from resistance to negotiation to acceptance to denial, as places defined themselves in terms of their past, which often seemed far more palatable than the present and future. In highly educated and sophisticated communities, filled with neo-natives from the elite groups in American society, such resistance could be powerful and all-encompassing. The loosely defined rubric of “quality of life” served as the concept behind such efforts. In communities with greater affinity to accept power from above, with fewer people who felt control over the fate of their place, such actions often consisted of grumbling disguised as social

critique. In all cases, the right to challenge change was conveyed through self-identification rituals that had social, cultural, and sometimes economic traits. These rituals, ranging from photographs of the people of Aspen, lined up next to markers connoting the year they arrived on the local rugby field to commercials reminding Las Vegans of “how it used to be before the volcano, before the pyramid,” proved local and neo-native identity and strengthened ties within the wide group that was no less than ambivalent about the changes tourism caused.

Tourists won't just mail in the checks and stay home — as much as many who serve the tourist industry might want them to. They're going to come in growing numbers, and they're going to make more forceful demands on the people and places they visit. Some are going to visit and stay; soon they'll represent you to the outside world. Other newcomers will come with the idea of getting their piece of the action.

In the process, these people will do a lot of things:

- 1) they'll challenge your idea of yourself, which is what is really for sale
- 2) they'll expose the fictions of community in clear and distinct ways
- 3) change what places are and who lives there as those places learn to cater to outside demands and their identity becomes tied to those outside demands.

In these and many other ways, tourism becomes a devil's bargain for places that embrace it. In the post-ironic recreational West, tourism has become the lifeblood for many places. Its many impacts are only now becoming clear, but it is certain that tourism represents a new form of post-industrial capitalism, a new way to organize the world that takes many of its cues from the colonial nature of extractive industries in the West.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have too long ignored tourism, especially in the United States and in the West. Only a handful of books have addressed the subject. By far the most outstanding and prescient is Earl Pomeroy, In Search of the Golden West: The Tourist in Western America (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1957), now more than forty years old but still the place from which all other studies of western tourism depart. John Jakle, The Tourist in 20th Century America (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985) is the major exception to the trend of neglect since Pomeroy; although Jakle's main emphasis is on the processes by which visitors go from place to place, his work opens new doors. John F. Sears, Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), and Michael Kammen, The Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991) also explore some facets of what I label cultural and heritage tourism. More recent works such as Dona Brown, Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996) and Leah Dilworth, Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996) open the way for cultural history interpretations of tourism. Marta Weigle and Barbara A. Babcock, eds. The Great Southwest of the Fred Harvey Company and the Santa Fe Railway (Phoenix: The Heard Museum, 1996) also contribute to the discussion. Despite my efforts here, most of the great monographs about tourism in the American West remain to be written.

Younger scholars are engaged in a significant amount of historical work about tourism. The most significant is Marguerite S. Shaffer, "See America First: Tourism and National

Identity” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University 1994), which sets its own dimensions for the relationship between tourism and identity. Other studies show promise; Anne Gilbert Coleman, “The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, 1996) and for the South, C. Brenden Martin, “Selling the Southern Highlands: Tourism and Community Development in the Mountain South,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1997), stand out, as does William Philpott, “Visions of a Changing Vail: Fast-Growth Fallout in a Colorado Resort Town,” (MA Thesis: University of Wisconsin, 1994). These younger scholars are pioneering a largely uncharted course’ I hope to offer them a road map that in the best scholarly tradition, they will soon discard for one of their own making.

The best work to date about tourism has come from social scientists, particularly geographers and sociologists. Dean MacCannell’s two major works, The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: Schocken Books, 1976) and Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers (New York: Routledge, 1993) have provided much context for the study of the field. MacCannell helps elucidate the subject, but is bound by an academic sensibility that skews the emphasis to the topics that interest academics. In this his work, despite its obvious brilliance, reveals both class and educational biases that mitigate against the understanding of a larger tourist whole on its own terms. Geographers have provided much of the ground work for this kind of study. Douglas Pearce is one of the best known; his voluminous research and that of many other geographers and miscellaneous social scientists are best compiled in a primer, Douglas Pearce, Tourist Development 2nd. Ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1989). Here Pearce synthesizes the work of thousands of articles, providing a fine assessment of the state of social science research. Karl Kim’s work on Hawai’i, especially Karl Kim, “Tourism on Our

Terms: Tourism Planning in Hawaii,” (Western Governors’ Association, 1991) and Karl Kim, “The Political Economy of Foreign Investment in Hawai’i,” Social Process in Hawaii 35 (1994), have added measurably to this study.

Most of the places in this book have historians of their own, some of which focus on tourism. At the Grand Canyon, J. Donald Hughes, In The House of Stone and Light: A Human History of the Grand Canyon (Grand Canyon, AZ: Grand Canyon Natural History Association, 1978) offers a fine history of the park; in Santa Fe, Chris Wilson, The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997) does an outstanding job of showing how tourism became tradition; while he and I mildly disagree on where the credit and blame lies, I can only wish his book had been published earlier. It would have saved me thousands of hours of research! Robert Righter, Crucible for Conservation: The Creation of Grand Teton National Park (Niwot, CO: Colorado Associated University Press, 1983) remains the standard for the Grand Teton region; David J. Saylor, Jackson Hole, Wyoming: In the Shadow of the Tetons (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970) offers the closest thing to a history of Jackson Hole that yet exists. Sureva Towler, The History of Skiing at Steamboat Springs (Steamboat Springs, CO: Sureva Towler, 1987) offers the first genuine look at local history there, while Doug Oppenheimer and Jim Poore, Sun Valley: A Biography (Boise, ID: Beatty Books, 1976) offers a look at that community. James Sloan Allen, The Romance of Commerce and Culture: Capitalism, Modernism, and the Chicago-Aspen Crusade for Cultural Reform (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) offers a powerful, influential, and comprehensive look at the phenomenon of Walter Paepcke and the Aspen he created. My friend and colleague Eugene P. Moehring’s work, Resort City in the Sun Belt:

Las Vegas, 1930-1970 (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1989) is an excellent look at the nuts and bolts of building a twentieth-century city. Robert Lacey, Little Man: Meyer Lansky and the Gangster Life (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1991) and Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris, The Green Felt Jungle (New York: Trident Press, 1963) dissect the Mob era in Las Vegas. Alan Hess, Viva Las Vegas: After-Hours Architecture, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993) is the best look at the architecture of Las Vegas and through it, the growth of entertainment tourism.

Each of the activities included here have histories. Lawrence R. Borne, Dude Ranching: A Complete History (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983) is a long overlooked but extremely significant work. Elizabeth Clair Flood, Old-Time Dude Ranches Out West: Authentic Ranches for Modern-Day Dudes (Salt Lake City: Gibbs-Smith, 1995) adds to Borne's story. Warren Belasco, Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945, (Boston: MIT Press, 1979) is the most important explication of autocamping. There is no comprehensive history of the ski industry to date; the closest is see E. John B. Allen, From Skisport to Skiing: One Hundred Years of an American Sport (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993). Abbott Fay, Ski Tracks in the Rockies: A Century of Colorado Skiing (Denver: Cordillera Press, 1984) offers a general history of Colorado skiing. For gaming, the best book is Jerome H. Skolnick, House of Cards: The Legalization and Control of Casino Gambling (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1978). John M. Findlay, People of Chance: Gambling in American Society from Jamestown to Las Vegas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) provides the cultural context. Another very useful volume is Peter Wiley and Robert Gottlieb, Empires in the Sun: The Rise of the New American West (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1982), which helps set the stage for understanding how western patterns of growth came to include service

economies. Incredibly valuable also is Arthur R. Gómez, *Quest for the Golden Circle: The Four Corners and the Metropolitan West, 1945-1970* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1989), a vastly underappreciated and under recognized work that has great implications for the study of the late twentieth century West.

The real stories of these places have been told through the eyes of their residents, all of whom shape what they say to fit their position on the local ladder. Again most places have their authors; typically, the more powerful and poignant the writing about a place, the greater the chance that resistance to change has proved futile. Memoirs comprise one category, but as all forms of autobiography, they are as important for where they stand as what they say. For Jackson, Struthers Burt, *The Diary of a Dude Wrangler* (New York: Charles Scribners, 1924) is the most comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon of neo-nativity; Burt is the consummate neo-native, always conscious of and even self-conscious about his position. His son, Nathaniel Burt, *Jackson Hole Journal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983) adds much, but is so much a part of what has occurred that his explanations sound tailored to his audience in the way his father manufactured experience for visitors. Donald Hough, *The Cocktail Hour in Jackson Hole* (Worland, WY: High Plains Publishing, 1956) offers another take on Jackson. Women offer some of the most lucid and incisive explications of change. Sun Valley's Dorice Taylor offers the classic displaced neo-native's tale in *Sun Valley* (Sun Valley, ID: Ex Libris Sun Valley, 1980). Raye Ringholz is both observer and participant, autobiographer and journalist in *Little Town Blues: Voices From a Changing West* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1992); Peggy Clifford, *To Aspen and Back Again: An American Journey* (New York: St. Marten's Press, 1979) defines Aspen and then analyzes its demise. Bruce Berger, *Notes of a*

Half-Aspenite, (Aspen, Colorado: Ashley and Associates, 1987) offers another view. Las Vegas lends itself much more to neo-native memoirs. John Rember, “On Going Back to Sawtooth Valley,” in William Studebaker and Rick Ardinger, eds., Where the Morning Light’s Still Blue: Personal Essays About Idaho (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press, 1994) offers a poignant look at the concept of home. Susan Berman, Easy Street (New York: Dial Press, 1981) offers an elegant and intimate look at Las Vegas; Hunter S. Thompson, Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, (New York: Popular Library, 1971) is far harder to categorize. Fiction writers such as John Rember and Tim Sandlin add measurably to the stories of places. John Rember, Cheerleaders from Gomorrah: Tales from the Lycra Archipelago (Lewiston, ID: Confluence Press, 1994), a only slightly veiled account of Sun Valley, offers one of the freshest literary voices to come from the West in years. Tim Sandlin, The Pymys: Unauthorized Tales of Jackson Hole (Jackson, WY: Jackson Hole Magazine, 1991) is a satirical account of change, local identity, and the claims to place of individuals and groups.