

reviews

BOOK REVIEW

Drawing the Line, Tales of Maps and Cartocontroversy.

Mark S. Monmonier, New York: Henry Holt, 1995, 368 pp., maps, index, notes. \$27.50 Hardbound. (ISBN 0-8050-2581-2)

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Political intrigue, deception, court battles, suspense. The newest best-selling thriller? No, it is Mark Monmonier's *Drawing the Line, Tales of Maps and Cartocontroversy*. Monmonier is certainly one of the most prolific writers in cartography and one of the best. In *Drawing the Line*, Monmonier continues his agenda of informing the public about maps, their strengths, and their dangers; and this book promises to reach the widest audience of all. Beginning with *Map Appreciation* (with George Schnell), and continuing through *How to Lie with Maps* and *Mapping It Out*, Monmonier has reached out to the nonspecialist, to the person who likes maps, uses maps, or needs maps. However, while the previous books were aimed primarily at social scientists, *Drawing the Line* is directed toward the general reader who frequents large chain bookstores.

In his preface, Monmonier notes that the map's combination of power (often because readers accept maps unquestioningly) and subjectivity (a necessary aspect of the cartographic process) has repeatedly put maps at the center of controversy. His stated goal here is "to lay out the territory of map controversy by exploring the ways maps are used to convince people and by examining how a

map can play various roles as a contest, prize, or stratagem" (2).

Monmonier tells his tales, old and new, in eight chapters, linking what sometimes seems like strange partners. For example, what, we might ask, do continental drift and geopolitics (the subjects of chapter five) have in common? On the surface, they have very little in common, yet Monmonier successfully links these two to show how maps are used in developing ideas and to establish the legitimacy of new scientific and political theories.

The book begins with the Peters projection and the battles that raged over it. Although this is a familiar story to most cartographers who followed the fight in journals and newspapers, with the perspective of time, Monmonier has been able to step back and look at the impact of the dispute.

The power of names on the map to assert ownership or express contempt is examined in "Place Names, Ethnic Slurs, and Ideological Renaming." The discussion ranges from prospectors' vulgar or obscene place names immortalized on maps to insults of almost every minority and the arrogant replacement of native names with European names. Thus, Monmonier ties geopolitics to the ideology that drives renaming. Similarly, "The Vineland Map, Columbus, and Italian-American Pride" is a tale of deception, forgery, and the ethnic pride of Italian-Americans and Scandinavian-Americans. While this conflict, like that of the Peters projection, may be familiar to many cartographic readers, they may not have followed the entire story and its consequences.

Court battles over boundaries and the role of cartographers as expert witnesses on both sides using maps as evidence are the subjects of chapter four, "Boundary Litigation and the Map as Evidence." Recent and historical battles for territory are used as

examples. Shifting the terms of these debates, "Maps, Votes, and Power" examines political redistricting and is a plea for better guidelines. It is a story of classic and modern gerrymandering.

"Siting, Cartographic Power, and Public Access" looks at the recent use of GIS in finding a site for a low-level radioactive waste dump in upstate New York. This could have been a dull tale, but through Monmonier's forceful writing a tale of intrigue, government chicanery, and public outrage unfolds. In "Risk Maps and Environmental Hazards," rather than relating a specific story about these increasingly important maps, Monmonier examines what he sees as their four aspects. First, he explores the design of environmental maps and the role of maps in risk communication. Then, he examines emergency-response maps and looks at the conflict between environmentalists and landowners over the representation of fragile wildlife habitats. Finally, he shows how maps aid in protecting the public's health and the environment as they reveal relationships between contamination and disease.

The Epilog should be required reading for anyone who believes that making a truly objective map is possible and that GIS will solve all mapping problems. Monmonier points out that it is not only maps done by obvious propagandists that are dangerous; unintentional bias can be just as misleading and treacherous. He also discusses problems that may arise in the future as cartography becomes more interactive and the distinction between mapmaker and map user is increasingly blurred. He cautions that databases containing meaningless and misleading information can be used to create meaningless or misleading maps. Inappropriate displays are but a keystroke or mouse click away when such databases exist. If one reads nothing else of the book, this

brief discussion is crucial.

Although since the 1940s sporadic research has been done on the role of maps as propaganda and on maps as tools of persuasion, in recent years the power of maps has become a popular topic with Brian Harley's and Denis Wood's work especially. Monmonier, who has been involved in many cartographic ventures, has taught cartography and map use, and is aware of the working cartographer's problems, has a different approach than Harley to the subject of map bias. Monmonier is more interested in educating the public than in blaming the cartographer. Although in the epilogue he discusses the cartographer's role, it is again more educational than censoring.

Rarely do books written by cartographers reach the shelves of mainstream bookstores. Historians or journalists usually write the few cartography books that can be found there (John Noble Wilford's *The Mapmakers*, for example). Monmonier, however, has managed to pull off the conjurer's trick of writing a book that is both scholarly (ample citations and bibliography) and readable. The writing is lively, personal, and clear; he is knowledgeable, insightful, and entertaining. This is a formidable combination.

But what about readers of *Cartographic Perspectives* and cartography students? Will we find this book too simplistic, telling us things we already know? While some tales may be familiar, doubtless not all are, even those which are familiar have some thought-provoking twists and information detail. There is excellent material here for lively seminar discussions, and some chapters open the door to further research.

Monmonier has told a series of intriguing tales and told them well; I recommend the book to cartographer and layperson alike. □

BOOK REVIEW

Mapping the Renaissance World: The Geographical Imagination in the Age of Discovery.

Frank Lestringant. Translated by David Fauset from *L'atelier du cosmographe*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994. xvii + 197 pp., illus., index. \$38.00 Hardbound. (ISBN 0-520-08871-9)

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The scope of this book is at the same time narrower and broader than its title might suggest. It is broader in that it is an examination of the general role of New World myths on European Renaissance literature. In other words, the "mapping" in the title is used both metaphorically and literally, and therefore it means something much broader than "cartography." Yet, the book's scope is limited by the fact that the theme is seen mainly through the eyes of one French cosmographer, André Thevet of Angoulême (1516-92). Fortunately, Thevet left most of his unfinished cosmographical manuscripts intact, "with the creative untidiness of its tools and materials, both unusual and ridiculous: maps of islands by the hundred, draft copies of his last unfinished books, representing up to four distinct stages of his work, and meticulously annotated mariner's charts. This *Wunderkammer* lacks only the monsters and prodigies that Thevet collected in what he called his 'most precious cabinet.'" One of the best known parts of his collection of Americana includes the Codex Mendoza and fragments on the religion of the Tupinamba Indians and Aztecs, which nourished his *Cosmographie universelle* (1575).

Readers of *Cartographic Perspectives* are likely to find two chapters of particular interest: chapter 1 "The Cosmographical Model," and chapter 5, "Cartographics: An Experience of the World and an Experiment on the World." If they venture into the other sections of the book, especially those dealing with the issues of the symbolism of the New World's influence on sixteenth-century literature, they will find themselves in the unfamiliar and sometimes bewildering land of literary criticism. As this review will reveal, the emphasis in this book does not lie in the traditional history of cartography, but it provides a very valuable context for the meaning of "cosmography" in the sixteenth century and its association with European mapmaking. In order to achieve this, Lestringant has provided an appendix with extracts from a previously unpublished manuscript of Guillaume Le Testu's *Cosmographie universelle* and a bibliography of works by André Thevet. The work also seems to have been well served by its translator, David Fauset.

The original French title was *L'atelier du cosmographe*—"The workshop of the cosmographer." The cosmographer, as we have seen, is Thevet, cosmographer to Henri III, the last of the French kings in the House of Valois. He entered the Franciscan order at the age of ten, and this monastic status later allowed him to travel, study, and write. His first voyage was to the Levant from 1549 to 1552 and resulted in the *Cosmographie de Levant*. But it was a second voyage to "Antarctic France"—founded on an islet in the Bay of Rio de Janeiro—that made his name. Based on ten weeks "among the most savage men of the universe," Thevet fashioned his book, the *Singularitez de la France Antarctique*. His exploration narratives came under severe attack by his contemporaries, Catholic and Protestant