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"I'LL PICTURESQUE IT EVERYWHERE": THE MARKET REVOLUTION, PRINT CULTURE, AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF TRAVEL IN AMERICA

Robin F. Bachin

Will B. Mackintosh, *Selling the Sights: The Invention of the Tourist in American Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2019. 244 pp. Figures, maps, notes, and index.

In his 1869 travel book *The Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain chronicled an all-expense-paid journey through Europe and the Holy Land aboard *The Quaker City*, a steamship carrying American travelers on this pleasure excursion. With his usual wit and satire, he offered commentary not only on the Old World sights his narrator visited but also on his fellow passengers aboard the ship. He sketched out portraits of the various types of tourists represented there, including "The Old Travelers," who "'prate, and drivel and lie. . . . They open their throttle-valves, and how they do brag, and sneer, and swell, and blaspheme the sacred name of Truth! Their central idea . . . is to subjugate you, keep you down, make you feel insignificant and humble in the blaze of their cosmopolitan glory!" (pp.147–48). Twain mocked the ambitions and pretensions of the "excursionists," highlighting the superficial nature of tourism and the banality, condescension, and exaggeration that seemed to define the emerging American character of the tourist.

The rise of the commodification of travel and the emergence of "the tourist" are the subjects of William B. Macintosh's *Selling the Sights*. He takes the "very definition of tourism itself" as a central question of the book (p. 12). He seeks to situate the rise of the tourist in the early republic alongside the growth of a market economy and the consequent commodification of leisure experiences, which ultimately fueled the derisive attitudes toward tourists in popular culture. He places the origins of tourism within the larger framework of changes in print culture and geographic knowledge, the transportation revolution, and the spread of the capitalist marketplace to illustrate how the experience of travel was transformed in the first decades of the nineteenth century. "Tracing the tourist's emergence as a distinct cultural figure," he argues, "shows how deeply the emerging national market economy impacted the cultural structures of nineteenth-century American life" (p. 5). He showcases

how the terms "traveler" and "tourist" began to diverge in the 1820s as leisure journeys became accessible to more Americans who had increasing access to geographical knowledge, improved transportation routes, and destinations promoted to attract them.

Macintosh draws on a wide array of sources, including letters, diaries, published travel accounts, guidebooks, social commentary, fiction, and advertisements to trace the rise of commodified leisure travel experiences. Indeed, he is at his best when providing close textual analysis of the variety of guidebooks and gazetteers that led American tourists along their far-flung adventures. He explores the changes in American geographical knowledge and writing that emerged as a result of the shifts in print culture taking place in the early nineteenth century. The early production of geographic texts in America sought to literally situate the new United States within the framework of global geography. Jedidiah Morse's 1793 *The American Universal Geography* provided Americans with encyclopedic coverage of world geographic knowledge. Macintosh builds on Susan Schulten's analysis in *The Geographical Imagination in America, 1880–1950* (2001) of early American cartography as a vehicle for shaping national identity by creating what she calls "a common territorial and topographic basis for nationhood" (p. 19).

Macintosh also chronicles how the desire to develop a national community of citizens well-versed in geographical knowledge fairly quickly gave way to the creation of guidebooks designed to drive growth in visits to specific local attractions. Where early geographical text authors like Morse dedicated themselves to painstakingly collecting and presenting geographical knowledge for the common good, new guidebook producers focused more on regional economic boosterism. Propelled by the ability to print material more cheaply and circulate it more broadly, these boosters saw geographic guidebooks and gazetteers as vehicles for promoting the strengths and aesthetic charms of their attractions to stimulate both local investment and increased tourism.

Central to this pivot in the production and distribution of geographic texts, argues Macintosh, was the commercialization and industrialization of book production by the middle of the nineteenth century. This process meant that the creation of guidebooks was concentrated in publishing centers such as Philadelphia and New York. Publishers like George P. Putnam, for example, straddled the transition in geographical publication, as he both served on the board of the American Geographical and Statistical Society and also established one of the leading publishing houses for geographic guidebooks and gazetteers in the nation. The nationalization of guidebook production took form in earnest in the 1840s, when George S. Appleton published *The American Guide Book, Being a Hand-Book for Tourists and Travellers through Every Part of the United States* (1846). With this publication, the guidebook moved from something produced by skilled geographers or local boosters to national publishing houses

producing the travel guides for their own commercial success. Increasingly, guidebook publishers sold packaged tours that detailed routes to be taken and specific stops and sights to be seen, making the travel experience easier and more comfortable but also less personalized or connected to a traveler's specific interests.

Macintosh effectively shows how travel became a purchasable commodity by the middle of the nineteenth century as a result of the transportation revolution that emerged from technological advances in waterway navigation by steamboats, the creation of canals, and the rise of railroads. These changes, combined with the distribution of guidebooks to help travelers navigate the new national landscape, set the stage for the commodification of travel.

In the 1820s, as a new network of turnpikes and the proliferation of stagecoaches and then railroad lines knitted regions together, more and more Americans ventured out on pleasure excursions, searching out natural landscapes and fashionable tours. As Mackintosh explains, "Travel was increasingly provided by a capital-intensive service industry that produced a commodity for sale into an expanding market that served a nation that was growing both geographically and demographically" (p. 57). To illustrate what this change looked like on the ground, he compares two different travel experiences of William Richardson, the son of a New England farm family. During his first trip in 1815, he traveled from Boston to New Orleans by stagecoach and ferryboat, on horseback and on foot. He often didn't know if his route would be passable or if he could secure adequate food and lodging. In summing up his trip, he called it "'tedious beyond description.'" Yet when he traveled from Louisville to New York thirty years later, now a prosperous banker and able to take advantage of the changing technologies of travel, his experience was dramatically different. Where during the 1815 trip Richardson was responsible for plotting every route, navigating every passage, securing every place of lodging, and negotiating with individual proprietors along the way, he later "recorded his trip as a series of transactions in which he bought *travel itself*, represented as an abstraction by slips of paper purchased from sales agents." His account of that trip reflected "his new status as a consumer rather than a producer; gone was the tone of assertive activity, replaced with a breezy and relaxed passive voice" (p. 64).

The discrepancies between these two travel accounts is at the crux of Mackintosh's argument about the changing nature of travel and the impact the commercial marketplace had on commodifying the travel experience. Richardson's latter description highlighted the "standardization of idiosyncratic individual experiences of travel into predictable and interchangeable experiences of summer leisure" (p. 6). Yet, at times, Mackintosh makes too much of a distinction between travel mediated by market exchange and the individual negotiations and personal communications that shaped the travel experience.

He gives the example of a narrator discussing her trip to Trenton Falls—one of the first and most popular tourist destinations in New York—and transferring trains in Utica. She uses her guidebook along the way to shape the complete experience of travel and the places she encounters. When a local Utica man volunteers information about a nearby bridge, she describes him as “an animated guide book.” Mackintosh interprets her clever turn of phrase to mean that she “expected to learn about her surroundings from an anonymous informant on the pages of a guidebook, not from flesh-and-blood people she met on the road” (p. 80). He explains that the narrator understood her local informant as “anthropomorphic print” (p. 80). Yet while travel certainly became more predictable, standardized, and mediated through print culture and packaged tours, the liminal experience of travel still maintained the more idiosyncratic interpersonal exchanges of earlier days. In fact, the narrator says that, after leaving Utica, she thought of more questions to ask the man about traveling to the Falls, but discovered that he had left the group. The narrator clearly saw the tourist experience as one that was both mediated by its commercial trappings and at the same time enriched by personal, one-on-one encounters.

Mackintosh is more persuasive in analyzing how the comfortable and convenient tourist experience quickly came to be regarded as superficial and meaningless, especially by more elite and experienced travelers but also among social commentators. He explains that “the market habits of mind that enabled the commodification of experience also contained the seeds of its most enduring critique” (p. 117). His discussion of the endless quest for the picturesque, which combined the desire to experience sublime natural landscapes with the convenience of having those experiences prepackaged and sold, highlights the emerging notion that the tourist experience lacked authenticity.

Mackintosh's discussion of the search for the sublime among mid-century American travelers draws on the work of Marguerite Shaffer and Richard Gassan, who both link appreciation of the American landscape as seen through leisure travel directly to an emerging sense of national identity. In *See American First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (2001), Shaffer finds “expressions of patriotic fervor and sublime transcendence” connected in American travel writing (p. 2). Gassan's *The Birth of American Tourism: New York, the Hudson Valley, and American Culture, 1790- 1835* (2008) highlights how the Hudson River Valley, in particular, became a source of national identity by at once connecting travelers to the sublime landscapes of the nation as well as to America's first literary and artistic movements in the writings of Washington Irving and James Fenimore Copper and the landscape paintings of Thomas Cole, Asher Durand, and other members of the Hudson River School that captured the seemingly untouched wilderness of the region. Yet in his discussion of Niagara Falls, Mackintosh shows how this connection between sublime landscapes, national identity, and emerging American artistic and literary traditions was

intimately tied to the commodified tourist experience. Between the hackmen charging travelers to take them over the bridge and the purveyors of Indian moccasins selling these "authentic" tribal artifacts, tourists were treated to a host of opportunities not just to experience the sights and develop a sense of national identity but also to consume representations of those places and their inhabitants.

It was this growing view of tourists as mindless consumers of prepackaged travel experiences that led to the archetype of the tourist as a banal social climber. Macintosh demonstrates how satirists on both sides of the Atlantic poked fun at tourists who used travel as a vehicle for carrying out their bourgeois ambitions. He draws parallels between satirical travel writing and the tall tales and verbal slapstick popular in periodical writing among humorists, including Mark Twain and Washington Irving. In their parodies of travel writing, in particular, these writers and others caricatured the shallow, gullible, and ignorant tourist who fell prey to conniving hucksters. Some went so far as to create faux guidelines for travel writers, suggesting that if you followed the prescribed formula, you would not even have to travel to the place you wrote about to be believable and sell books. British travel writer Captain Marryat published an essay in 1833 entitled "How to Write a Book of Travels," in which one of his characters convinces another that he need not travel to the Rhine to write authoritatively about it. This exchange highlights the extent to which it was a popular trope in satirical writing that tours were so interchangeable and travel writing was so formulaic and unoriginal that both could be easily reproduced and transposed to new destinations.

Mackintosh calls the publishing firms purveying new travel guidebooks and gazetteers "culture industry entrepreneurs," as "geographical knowledge was thoroughly commodified for an audience of prospective travelers" (p. 25). Yet while he astutely reveals the extent to which geographical knowledge was commercialized to help create a new class of leisure travelers, he stretches the connection too far with the analytic reference to the "culture industry." He argues that, in the promotion of tourism, "as with other culture industries, the tumbling rush of affordable entertainment existed alongside an imperative for standardization" (p. 52). Indeed, the Frankfurt School theorists who shaped the culture-industry thesis focused on the loss of spontaneity to the production of standardized cultural goods through mass culture and mass media. Yet, that framing emerged at a particular moment—during the interwar period and the rise of fascism—that gives it a historical specificity that cannot be simply transposed to an earlier era. Certainly, their argument that the culture industry creates artificial needs and desires that only can be satisfied through consumption of capitalist goods is similar to the results in loss of freedom, creativity, and independence that Mackintosh's travel story exposes. Yet it is not clear what the analytic payoff is in using the culture industry terminology to discuss market forces shaping travel writing a century earlier.

Macintosh concludes his analysis of the rise of the tourist in American culture with the reformist reaction to the superficiality of commodified travel. He points to the search for a culture of refinement and "traveling to good purpose"—the attempt to recapture the values of the early republic, including production over consumption, truth over tall tales, and authentic experiences over commodified ones. He highlights the new emphasis on useful and purposeful travel that emerged in travel writing as a counterpoint to the consumer-oriented guidebooks of previous decades. He gives the example of Theodore Dwight—from a prominent family of New England writers, theologians, and educators—who authored several travel books on "the flora, fauna, agriculture, morals and manners of New England's people." In an essay entitled "Travelling to Good Purpose," Dwight urged travelers to discriminate "with readiness and clearness between the useful and the useless" (p. 156). Traveling for good purpose meant making rigorous historical, scientific and moral observations and recording them for educational purposes. According to Dwight, it was important to be acquainted with "geography, history, economy and society of the United States," and his writing focused on the objectivity of scientific observation (p. 157).

This "traveling to good purpose," and the scientific writing inspired by it, was a counterpoint not only to frivolous and exaggerated travel writing but also the rise of the novel and romantic fiction that became increasingly popular at this time. Where scientific writing was deemed objective, rational, and therefore masculine, novels were regarded as emotional, indulgent, and feminine. This gendering of print culture, argues Macintosh, drew a sharp distinction between empirical knowledge and masculine self-control, and female romanticism and the preference for "fancied media" like novels. Yet Macintosh effectively shows how female travel writers, such as British author Harriet Martineau and American literary critic and reformer Margaret Fuller, turned this gendered binary in travel writing on its head by highlighting objective observation alongside sympathy and morals. "If he be full of sympathy, everything will be instructive and the most important matters will be completely revealed. If he be unsympathizing, the most important things will be hidden from him, and symbols (from which every society abounds) will be only absurd or trivial forms," argued Martineau, in an explanation of how to obtain the most accurate accounting of cultures and foreign places (p. 167). Mackintosh suggests that Martineau and Fuller championed a kind of "romantic science" that "fused sensibility with rational discernment and moral strength to create a distinctly female claim to authority" (p. 168). And he highlights how their work reclaimed the features of unmediated, pedestrian, localized travel that made the experience more authentic and purposeful since only through these localized interactions could one obtain "knowledge of the people."

Mackintosh does an excellent job of highlighting the transformations that took place in the early decades of the nineteenth century as travel shifted from

scientific and geographic expeditions undertaken to communicate universal knowledge to the commodified consumer-oriented leisure experience mediated by the market. His attention to the transitions in print culture and the nuances of the purposeful, boastful, and satirical accounts of travelers points to the significance of these forms of writing in transforming popular opinion about so-called true travelers and tourists. This is an impressive book that will be of enormous interest to students and scholars of travel and tourism, geography, print culture, and American culture more broadly.

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