Reviews

Christopher W. Wells. *Car Country: An Environmental History*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012. xxxiv + 427 pp. ISBN 978-0-2959-9215-0, $40.00 (cloth).

Christopher Wells' book explores the creation of what he calls *Car Country* in the United States, a nation almost entirely dependent upon personal automobiles for transportation. The relationship between Americans and automobiles has long been wrapped in mythology about the nation's love affair with the road. Wells demystifies this history by studying the structural basis of why Americans need to drive and centering his analysis on how road building shaped the nation's relationship to the automobile.

Much of the historical literature on car-centric infrastructure centers on the post–World War II explosion of interstate highways, shopping malls, and suburbia. Wells grounds his study in the early twentieth century, when automobiles' sudden appearance forced unprepared cities to manage the enormous number of cars pouring onto overcrowded streets. The new field of urban planning began tackling the maelstrom of city streets, where automobiles joined horses, pedestrians, streetcars, and vendors on the road. Wells convincingly argues that traffic regulations were a site of struggle for control over the road, with drivers forcing work and pedestrians off the street. New zoning ordinances began regulating the relationship between traffic and buildings, ultimately creating a more rigid and less diverse cityscape. After World War I, increasingly powerful vehicles and government investment in improved roads allowed Americans new freedom in private transportation. Automobiles annihilated space and time in a way equally revolutionary as trains in the nineteenth century because it did so uniformly through space unlike linear train lines and because of the power it gave individual travelers.

In the countryside, farmers' resistance to improved roads and city-dwelling drivers declined in the face of increased rural mobility. This transformed rural life. One-room schoolhouses closed after town schools consolidated. Chain stores began serving smaller towns, driving general stores out of business. The influences of locality and

kinship on rural life faded with fast and smooth roads overcoming isolation.

The convenience of automobiles created political, corporate, and popular support for reshaping the nation in order to accommodate them. Beginning with the Federal Aid Road Act of 1916 and especially after the Federal Highway Act of 1921, the government committed to a vigorous road construction program. Gasoline taxes that remained hidden within the cost of a gallon of fuel funded this expansion. Most states dedicated gas taxes exclusively to highway construction, which allowed for the continued growth of high-quality roads through the Great Depression. By the passage of the Federal Aid Highway of 1956 that created the interstate system, Wells argues the preconditions for Car Country were already in place, with automobile-oriented transportation policies, government subsidies for low-density development, and profitability for developers well established.

This financial success of Car Country allowed urban planners to undertake a radical reconstruction of American cities in the 1950s and 1960s, eventually making it impossible for most Americans to not own a vehicle. Urban renewal and interstate construction transformed the urban core. Sites of consumerism shifted from small urban shops to suburban shopping malls. Free, on-site parking became necessary for new developments. Single-use zoning separated housing from commercial districts.

Wells grounds this history and the impact of American car culture within a series of ecological and landscape transformations. New uses for petroleum led to severe pollution issues, both in its production and consumption. Manufacturing vehicles required huge corporate investments in metal, rubber, and timber. Roads dissected animal habitats and created the phenomenon of roadkill. Car country spawned new ways for Americans to interact with the landscape. The federal government created a car-friendly nature through road building. National parks became "windshield wildernesses" for tourists. Automobiles simplified and stressed ecosystems while allowing a growing middle-class to visit the nation's beautiful places, creating vacation experiences that influenced Americans to support environmental protections later in the twentieth century.

Wells' environmental and landscape analysis sharpens the book's focus. He could also have tapped into the growing literature connecting environmental and labor history to explore the health effects of automobile production upon workers. Also, as labor historians such as Lisa Fine and Lawrence Lipin have shown, working-class people used automobiles to access recreational spaces they wanted to use for hunting, fishing, and hiking and fought to preserve the ecological

integrity of those spaces. More detail on car country's class implications upon nature would have enhanced an already rich study.

Car Country is a valuable addition to our knowledge on urban development, the environmental impact of automobiles, and the evolution of the twentieth-century American landscape. As the world tries to grip with cataclysmic climate change, Wells concludes that a century of American decisions around automobile infrastructure has created new environmental limits that threaten the old limits Americans threw off with the freedom of the car.

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Dimitry Anastakis. *Autonomous State: The Epic Struggle for a Canadian Car Industry from OPEC to Free Trade*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. xvi + 549 pp. ISBN 978-1-4426-4504-2 (cloth); 978-1-4426-1297-6, $39.95 (paper).

The automotive industry was central to the emergence of Canada's manufacturing sector, and in particular that of Southern Ontario, in the post-World War II period. Current fears regarding the decline of manufacturing in Canada and the fear of again becoming an economy dominated by natural resource exports make this work a timely and valuable addition to the literature on Canada's economic development.

The Auto Pact negotiated in 1965 between Canada and the United States shaped the automotive industry in Canada. It had two key features. It created a free trade zone for car and truck production between the two countries, allowing production to be rationalized on a continental basis. But it was a managed free trade agreement that included specific guarantees to ensure a certain minimum level of production in Canada. Dimitry Anastakis explored the emergence of this managed free trade arrangement in *Auto Pact, 2005*. *Autonomous State* is a follow-up study examining the process of continental rationalization under the Auto Pact, the tensions between Canada and the United States over the benefits from the sector, and its eventual demise under the 1989 Free Trade agreement.

There is much to like about this work. It is a solid piece of academic research. It reaches beyond the mere facts of how the industry evolved under managed trade, to explore what the Auto Pact meant