

Harpers Ferry and grimy factory yards of Waterloo with the account of Guadalcanal's naval battles. He quickly moves the reader from the banks of the Cedar River to the waters of the South Pacific.

The five Sullivan brothers, sons of a hard-drinking railroad worker and a sickly mother, were not the good natured, all-American altar boys portrayed in the movies. All five were high school dropouts noted for rough-and-tumble fist fights and loud motorcycles. Although Al was the youngest of the boys, he was the only brother to marry and have a child. George and Frank enlisted in the depression-era Navy. Galvanized by the attack on Pearl Harbor, George and Frank immediately decided to reenlist and easily persuaded their brothers to join them if they could all serve together. Few in the Navy saw their request as implicitly dangerous. Assigned to the USS *Juneau*, the Sullivans led undistinguished lives until a torpedo attack sank their ship in seconds. Four brothers died immediately. George survived for a few days before succumbing to delirium, exhaustion, and dehydration.

This small book indicates that the impact of the Sullivan brothers' experience is still reverberating in recent presidential decisions regarding U.S. involvement in combat, in Waterloo's renaming of their convention center, and in the dedication of a new ship, the USS *Sullivan Brothers*. Furthermore, Satterfield presents an interesting narrative of denial: the brothers' denial of inherent danger, the Navy's denial of the potential loss of ship and crew, the Sullivan family's psychological denial of the deaths, and the community's denial of the stages of grief. From the beginning, no one wanted to believe such a catastrophe could happen, and once it occurred, no one knew how to deal with it. As the author well documents, the military sanitized and mythologized the Sullivan family personalities and history, the family set aside their own grief to participate fully in the national solemnization of the deaths, and Waterloo repudiated the significance of the disaster. The Sullivan calamity is not just about five brothers; it is a tragic chapter in the annals of America and Iowa.

*Slide Mountain: Or the Folly of Owning Nature*, by Theodore Steinberg. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. x, 214 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, index. \$30.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY GAIL E. H. EVANS, SILVERTON, OREGON

*Slide Mountain* is an entertaining account of human efforts to own nature. In a series of humorously written essays, Theodore Steinberg considers how the American obsession for possessing nature—land, water, clouds, and air—has been acted out in locations as diverse and

distant from each other as the Missouri River's Blackbird Bend at the Nebraska-Iowa border, Louisiana's bayou country, Arizona's Sonoran desert, the Blue Ridge Mountains of Pennsylvania, and New York City. For each place Steinberg examines the perplexing problems that have arisen when modern property law is unable to order or control nature in a twentieth-century world thoroughly mastered by science and technology. Ultimately, Steinberg argues that "the impulse to turn everything into property has not just confused but impoverished our relationship with the natural world by reducing that world in all its complexity into a giant legal abstraction" (10).

The case of Blackbird Bend illustrates how the law of property ownership has failed to "tidy up the messy and dynamic world of nature" (50). In 1854 the federal government allotted the Omaha Indians reservation lands that included Blackbird Bend, a thumb of land projecting from the Nebraska side of the Missouri River. Over the next several decades, the Omahas gradually sold off much of their land to white owners. Blackbird Bend, however, disappeared from the reservation without any legal transactions. Sometime in the early twentieth century, the unpredictable meandering of the so-called Big Muddy shifted and, in the process, moved Blackbird Bend to the Iowa side of the Missouri—outside the reservation. Beginning in the late 1960s, a series of legal battles attempted to resolve the ownership of the peripatetic Blackbird Bend. Eventually, a federal appeals court ruled in favor of the Omahas. The numerous confused and often contradictory legal arguments put forward in the case of Blackbird Bend, Steinberg argues, suggest that to "imagine Blackbird Bend as a thing . . . is to picture it in isolation from the world" (49).

Steinberg's case studies bring to mind other historical examples of the "folly of owning nature." Drought and dust storms in the 1930s that transported tons of midwestern topsoil thousands of miles away had no legal remedy. Property laws could neither ensure protection against the devastating 1993 Mississippi flood waters nor provide land owners adequate compensation for their losses.

But these case studies not only yield historical insight; they also have contemporary relevance. Basic cultural assumptions that have shaped our legal system bear on some current hotly debated environmental issues. In the mid-1990s many lawmakers seem increasingly receptive to demands made by antienvironmental citizen organizations to privatize public spaces in nature, to compensate private property owners for losses claimed when existing environmental legislation is implemented or enforced, and to capitalize on nature's economic potential in other ways. Energizing such movements is the belief that

property ownership ensures control over and monetary rewards from possessing nature.

Steinberg's stories illustrate that our individual and societal penchant to possess property has yielded some laughable outcomes. As the author warns, however, the joke may be on all of us if we persist in believing that property ownership can unfailingly bring order to a chaotic, often uncooperative nature. Steinberg contends that "a culture so single-minded in its pursuit of property, especially private property, may sacrifice . . . its 'evolutionary flexibility' and thereby foreclose on other ways . . . of relating to the earth" (10).

Anyone who owns or has contemplated owning a piece of nature as well as historians of the Midwest (and the other places described) and of law and the environment will find that *Slide Mountain* is not only entertaining and informative but also instructive. Additionally, Steinberg's skill at showing how culture, modern technology, and law inform Americans' attitudes toward and dealings with nature in this solidly researched book makes it a fresh contribution to the expanding field of environmental history.

*Getting By: Women Homeworkers and Rural Economic Development*, by Christina E. Gringeri. Rural America Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994. viii, 200 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$27.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY BONNIE LINDEMANN, ST. AMBROSE UNIVERSITY

In *Getting By*, Christina Gringeri offers a picture of rural homework by assembling interviews, town council minutes, and company contracts as deliberately and skillfully as the homeworkers who are her subjects assemble kits of auto parts. She compares the results of her fieldwork in rural Iowa and Wisconsin to studies of women homeworkers in developing and developed nations and concludes that rural economic development is being subsidized by the underpaid workers it claims to benefit.

Gringeri's description of her struggle to win and keep the approval of company officials as she conducted her interviews is illuminating, as is her reconstruction of the political process that brought the company referred to as TMC to two economically depressed midwestern regions. Although the homeworkers are classified for tax purposes as independent contractors, it becomes clear to the reader as it did to the investigator that the women have neither autonomy nor control of the working situation.

Gringeri presents the story through extensive excerpts from her interviews with homeworkers, organized into common themes. To

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