

Did Greenpeace Matter?

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Literary Review of Canada

The traps
of progress

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Moving beyond survival

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Bad-guy history

North Americans, declares reviewer **Mark Proudman**, now cast themselves as villains in their own history books



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Bad-Guy History

Two new books reflect our ambivalence about our own imperial past.

MARK F. PROUDMAN

The American Empire and the Fourth World: The Bowl with One Spoon, Part One

Anthony J. Hall

McGill-Queen's University Press

683 pages, hardcover

ISBN 0773523324

The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650–1900

John C. Weaver

McGill-Queen's University Press

497 pages, hardcover

ISBN 0773525270

The decline of historical narrative has been widely announced, sometimes with glee, probably more often with anger or regret. Jean-François Lyotard, one of those polysyllabic Parisians whom so many love to hate, has famously defined postmodernism as skepticism toward all guiding narratives, and that skepticism has informed much of the criticism of the kind of sweeping narratives of nations and civilizations that historians once wrote.

In this country, J.L. Granatstein has emphasized the political importance of such narratives, and famously regretted the occlusion of a unifying national narrative by the academic fascination with micro-histories of “housemaids in Belleville.” Neither Anthony J. Hall’s *The American Empire and the Fourth World: The Bowl with One Spoon* nor John C. Weaver’s *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650–1900* can be accused of being housemaid history: both sweep globally over centuries. Both share with Sir John Seeley’s *Expansion of England* of 1883 what in Lyotard’s sense of the term is a very modern preoccupation with broad world-historical movements, and, like Seeley, both place the British Empire at the centre of their stories.

Seeley’s *Expansion of England*, based on lectures given at Cambridge, traced the spread of English power, influence and people around the globe. It became a long-running best seller, remaining in print from 1883 to 1956, a rare achievement for a work of historical interpretation. For Seeley, the British Empire of his day was the product of a long 18th-century struggle with France: that century saw Anglo-French wars approximately once a decade, and culminated

in the French revolutionary wars that ended with the British victory at Waterloo in 1815. But this “second hundred years war,” as Seeley called it, occurred primarily outside Europe, and resulted in the English conquest of India, the secession of the United States, and the British settlement of Australasia and Canada. Those 18th-century wars did much to determine the shape of the English-speaking, Anglo-American planet that we now inhabit. The two more recent works under review here trace the same story in their own ways.

Historians often speak of two British empires, one preceding American independence, and a second that rose during and after the wars of the French Revolution, and that eventually, even without the United States, covered a quarter of the globe. For Seeley, and indeed for most of his Victorian contemporaries, there were also two British empires, but whereas one was an empire of emigration and settlement in places such as North America, South Africa and Australia, the

Perhaps the most interesting thing about us is our vast, retroactive sense of guilt at the success of our ancestors.

other was purely an empire of conquest, chiefly in India and, in the latter decades of the 19th-century, also in Africa. Weaver and Hall emphasize the settlement empire: it was on this continent, in countries such as Canada and the United States, that the British Empire created its most enduring legacy.

Seeley’s emphasis on the importance of the settlement empire went so far that he could describe the United States as “almost as good as a colony to us.” Weaver’s *Great Land Rush* argues that the export of “an English obsession with landed property,” and also of English ideas concerning property rights, enabled by the technology for surveying and marking land, was central to what Seeley called the “expansion of England.” For Weaver, the establishment and global export of absolute property rights are central characteristics of modernity, and those rights are, of course, most highly venerated in the United States. He makes an excellent case.

Weaver begins in 1650, at which point the Puritans had but recently established themselves in New England, and New France was a series of settlements clinging to the shores of the St. Lawrence. Australia and New Zealand were unknown to Europeans, and the Dutch East India Company would shortly, in 1652, establish a victualling station at the Cape of Good Hope, thus leading to the European settlement of South Africa. Three

hundred and fifty years ago, Europeans and their civilization were largely confined to Europe. In the next two centuries, that changed. The establishment of what Weaver, following Alfred Cosby in his *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*, calls “neo-European” societies on extra-European continents was, for him, the defining event, or series of events, in modern history.

The result is a history striking above all for its global scope: Weaver moves back and forth with great authority between patterns of settlement and land use in North America, the Australasian countries, and South Africa, with excursions into Argentina, and comparative remarks on settlement patterns in the other colonial empires. He focuses upon the processes by which land became real estate, which is to say the ways in which lands occupied or traversed by Native peoples were acquired and turned into private property by European, largely British, settlers. *The Great Land Rush* is a comparative history, distinguished above all by the massive body of evidence with which it shows the relations among environmental factors, Native resistance, legal practices and global markets in establishing patterns of land ownership and use in the English-speaking world. The result is a work of impressive scholarship, but also a work that may be daunting to the non-specialist: Weaver can move in a paragraph from New Zealand’s Maori wars to the United States’ contemporaneous Indian wars, without stopping for much narrative explanation.

As Weaver argues, the conversion of land into real estate was a process informed by the legal and moral ideas of English individualism. John Locke, in his well-known *Second Treatise of Government*, taught that all men possessed originally the fruits of their own labour, and that by combining labour with unenclosed land, “he that, in obedience to the command of God, subdued, tilled and sowed any part of it, thereby annexed to it something that was his property.” The man whose labour was inextricably mixed with a parcel of land thereby acquired property in the land. This Lockean doctrine of the right of ownership in land depended on the notion of improvement, by which land was “subdued, tilled and sowed,” and so made useful for settled agriculture.

The concept of improvement reflected the experience of early modern farming: the labour required to prepare land for cultivation—the labour of fencing, draining, manuring, removing rocks, plowing, sowing—was immense, as could be the capital investment involved. Early political

Mark F. Proudman is completing a doctoral thesis on late Victorian anti-imperialism at New College, Oxford, and is also a contributor to the *National Post*.

economists focused a great deal of attention on the relative amounts of labour and capital required to make what David Ricardo and many others called “waste land” productive. Weaver shows the pervasive influence of these doctrines of what has been referred to as possessive individualism and their consequences in classical political economy, especially, but not only, in the United States. In Locke’s famous words, in a slightly different context, “in the beginning, all the world was America,” and Weaver shows how this image of America, and by extension the rest of the unenclosed or unsettled globe, motivated the global expansion of English power, culture and people—and of English notions of property rights.

In one of his most illustrative passages, Weaver relates a dispute in the famous western *Shane*—based on Jack Schaefer’s novel—between a homesteader and a rancher, in which the former insists that he owns the land that he has fenced, tilled and improved, while the latter claims that he found it first and deserves credit for clearing it of Indians. As this allusion makes clear, the great land rush was often a violent process, involving not merely violence between settlers and Natives but also between competing groups of settlers.

Weaver’s point in citing *Shane* is that America’s founding experience consisted of the conquest and occupation of unsettled land, and that centuries-long process formed the modern world so profoundly that arguments rooted in Locke can come out in popular culture, enunciated and understood by people who have never heard of, let alone read, that 17th-century philosopher.

The last great land grab occurred on the Canadian prairies, previously isolated by distance and winter, after the 1869 acquisition by the Dominion government of the Hudson’s Bay Company land claims. Weaver writes that the settlement of the Canadian prairies featured only “two fleeting rebellions,” in 1870 and 1885, largely because the Natives had already been decimated by starvation, and because the Dominion had learned from the experience of others—largely the Americans—how to go about the efficient allocation and settlement of land. The myth of Canadian peaceableness is, as Weaver makes clear, a benefit of having done things last.

The “modern temperament,” whose origins Weaver traces to “the great land rush,” is defined by “a faith in increase, a pursuit of bounty justified by improvement, allusions to new frontiers, refinements of legal instruments governing new forms of property, the abstracted representation of places on documents, a free-enterprise distrust of government combined with a reliance on government.” Throughout, he expresses doubts about the ethics of land-taking from “First Peoples”—that favoured and obsequious term—

and insists that such peoples are not better off as a result of the expansion of Europe.

Anthony J. Hall focuses primarily upon North America, and he shares Weaver’s concern for “first peoples,” or in Hall’s appropriated term, “the fourth world.” His title points to his twin concerns: the American empire and the aggrieved but virtuous “fourth world” of what he calls “Indian Country.” The volume’s alternate title, “The Bowl with One Spoon, Part One,” refers to a wampum image of such a bowl, said to represent hunting territories in the Ohio valley, which were to be shared in common among a number of tribes. It was these territories that Hall’s hero Tecumseh set out to defend against American encroachment by forming a confederacy of Indian tribes, a confederacy rapidly defeated by the future President William Henry Harrison at the battle of Tippecanoe in 1811. Hall makes it clear that he regrets the failure of Tecumseh’s project, and even reproduces a contemporary map showing North America divided between Spain, a truncated United States east of the Rockies and south of the Missouri and Ohio rivers, but dominated by “The Indian Country of Canada.”

I first found Hall’s volume in the Bush-baiting section of my local bookstore, alongside Michael

page door-stopper to do no more than mention briefly Riel’s rebellions, promising to get to them in a future volume. History, said Seeley, “should not merely gratify the reader’s curiosity about the past, but modify his view of the present and his forecast of the future,” and Hall would agree completely. Unfortunately, Hall rarely leaves his view of the present behind long enough to satisfy the reader’s curiosity about the past. It rapidly becomes obvious that all good things are associated with “Indian Country,” all bad ones with the U.S.: Tecumseh, for instance, is said to embody the “living essence” of Canadian public broadcasting and socialized medicine. Victorian constitutional historians used to locate the origins of representative government in the customs of Teutonic tribes; in exactly the same way, Hall projects the values of the present onto his preferred group of pre-literate barbarians.

Hall is at pains to emphasize the importance of Native tribes in the diplomacy of the period of the French revolution and empire. But having established to his satisfaction the centrality of Natives, he moves on a short number of pages later to complain about the injustices done them, pointing out quite correctly that aboriginal participation was “totally absent” from the many international treaties of the period. That the latter point undermines the former is, however, entirely lost on our author: once able to get to a desired conclusion—Natives were important; Natives were ill-used—he has little motive for further thought.

In a similar vein, Hall repeatedly reproves the “evangelical” and even “theocratic” nature of the United States, all the while referring to his hero Tecumseh as a “martyr” and speaking without irony of “the creator and her intentions”: evidently some religions are more equal than others. There is a curious rhetorical conflict between

Hall’s attempts to plumb the profundities of Native spirituality and his polysyllabic and often execrable academic prose. He cannot resist an adjective.

Numerous critics of the United States are quick to insist that they are not anti-American, that some of their best friends are American, and that they dislike only a given policy or a certain administration. There is something almost refreshing in a writer who honestly hates America, and the verb is not too strong: Hall quotes Tecumseh’s brother, the Shawnee seer Tenkwatawa, to the effect that the Americans are “the children of the evil spirit. They grew from the scum of the great water ... I hate them,” and one can only gather from the context that these words are offered for the reader’s moral instruction. Hall even compares Osama bin Laden, a “maverick member of the United States’ puppet regime in the oil rich principality of Saudi Arabia,” to Tenkwatawa. Hall elsewhere writes, in addressing the events of 9/11, of “the



Moore and Noam Chomsky. For Hall, as for his American confrères, there is one centre of evil in the world, and his book’s garish cover, featuring Old Glory with the white stars replaced by silhouettes of Apache attack helicopters, makes its theme clear. Hall begins his story with U.S. tanks rolling into Baghdad, and he returns repeatedly to the iniquities of the United States, “the crusading, genocidal centre of the evangelical American empire.” In Hall’s view, had Tecumseh succeeded in founding his Native republic, the “American empire” would have been constrained to abandon its imperial ways. Where that would have left the 20th century’s struggles against Hitler and Stalin is a question that does not occur to him.

In the spirit of the familiar adage against judging a book by its cover, I hoped to find in Hall a comprehensive if committed history of settler-Native relations on this continent. I was disappointed: Hall’s writing is so verbose, and his frequent digressions on the iniquities of George Bush so obtrusive, that he has space in this 683-

Letters & Responses

implications of some contemporary reckoning in the global community with the crimes against humanity committed [sic] against Indigenous peoples,” primarily by (of course) the United States.

I could spend this entire review pointing out Hall’s ludicrous descriptions of contemporary questions—if the Saudis are puppets, it is curious that the Americans have such trouble pulling their strings—but to do so would miss a more informative point about Canadian politics. Hall is able to quote Jean Chrétien twice to the effect that western arrogance and global inequality caused 9/11. Sunera Thobani, a former Liberal-appointed Ottawa official and now a professor at Simon Fraser University, caused a bit of a flap when, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, she told an audience of eminent people that the war on terror was a war on aboriginal peoples. She later, in her own defence, protested that her views were not that radical. We have here, in a large and presumably peer-reviewed volume in the prestigious series on Native affairs put out by McGill-Queen’s University Press, the proof of her point: these views are almost mainstream, and they are echoed in however attenuated a form by senior politicians.

This book-length academic narrative will form some part of the intellectual and bureaucratic armoury of the Native rights industry, and will provide another footnote for the large and influential class that believes in the fundamentally malignant character of the “American empire of private property.” The Native rights industry consumes \$8.8 billion annually, and of course it overlaps the state-funded anti-American intelligentsia at many points—between them they consume a quantity of tax money similar to what we spend on national defence.¹ Hall speaks for an influential and well-oiled group, even if he does—with a striking lack of self-awareness—continually cast himself as a voice in the wilderness.

Canada is presented by Hall as the outgrowth of a non-American, consensual and multicultural understanding between George III and his Native allies. Although he has many harsh words for various aspects of Canadian Native policy, Canada is really, in his view, a “mestizo” country rooted in Native traditions of governance, and therefore the philosophical opposite of the “monocultural liberalism” of the American “scum.” Such ideas are in the air: the Governor General, borrowing language from her consort, John Ralston Saul, proclaimed in her installation speech in 1999 that Canada is built upon “a triangular foundation—aboriginal, francophone and Anglophone,” and Saul’s best-selling *Reflections of a Siamese Twin* goes to some lengths to explain that we are a “northern nation,” fundamentally different from the domineering, western nation to our south. Although it would be easy to hold vice-regal talk of the “nordicity” of a nation of condo dwellers up to mockery, clearly the Canadian intelligentsia feels a deep sense of unease with our roots as an Anglo-Saxon settler state, and is at pains to construct some less tainted national origins.

The central premise of Locke’s theory of property was that the resources of the earth exist “for the benefit and greatest conveniences of life,” and it would not be difficult to argue that the Anglo-American settler states—the “neo-Britains” in Weaver’s term—do a better job of providing such benefits to the life chances of their citizens than do most other social orders, never mind the pre-literate nomadic society of Tecumseh. But such arguments sound almost indecent to many today, and neither Weaver nor Hall seriously engage with this aspect of Locke’s argument. If there is one obvious difference between Seeley and his 21st-century successors, it is a massive loss of cultural self-confidence.

Seeley, in one his most famous remarks, said that “we [English] seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind.” We Canadians are the children of those conquerors. It will for many years be impossible to discuss that process of conquest and settlement without reference to Weaver’s authoritative volume. The same cannot be said for Hall, although it must be admitted that he unintentionally provides a rough guide to the mind of a certain kind of mainstream tax-payer-funded anti-American intellectual. Perhaps the most interesting thing about us is our vast, retroactive sense of guilt at the success of our ancestors. Just as Seeley’s narrative tells us much about the Victorians, we can learn something about our own society by reading these more recent narratives. We now write histories in which we Anglo-Americans—and most people reading a literary review in Canada are culturally Anglo-American—have become history’s villains. □

Note

1. For spending on Native rights, see the 2004-05 *Report on Plans and Priorities* for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and the Canadian Polar Commission, at <www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/jest-pre/20042005/INAC-AINC/INAC-AINCr4501_e.asp#po>.

To the Editor:

While Peter Desbarats (“Something Rotten,” November 2004) understands that William Kaplan has a long history of attacking me, he also appears to accept Kaplan’s judgement of me.

What Desbarats doesn’t understand is that many of Kaplan’s conclusions are untrue.

Desbarats says, for example, that “like many journalists in the same situation, during the years of her research Cameron found herself trading information with her police sources.”

I had no police sources during my years of research into corruption in the Mulroney regime for *On the Take*, nor did I have any for the work I did on *The Last Amigo*. I traded nothing. Indeed, *On the Take* showed the laziness and almost criminal incompetence of the RCMP in their investigations of corruption during the Mulroney years.

I did not need or want police sources. My sources included the bureaucrats, politicians, political aides, chefs, lobbyists, fundraisers, Mulroney cronies, hairdressers, decorators, consultants, business people and many others—but no cops.

I did indeed meet two RCMP officers at their request in 1995 long before an official Airbus investigation was launched, a meeting that was known and approved by my editors before it happened. The fact that I was interviewed by the Mounties was no secret—I mentioned it openly many times in speeches after it happened. I gave them some public information, another fact that I have mentioned publicly and that—at the time—I agreed would be disclosed if they did ever start a formal investigation and the case came to trial. Otherwise, the contents of the interview were clearly off the record, for both sides.

As the RCMP officer now in charge of the case, Superintendent Alan Mathews, has admitted in court, I did not know that he used me as a confidential informant in a 1999 search warrant, nor did I know he made it official by coding me as an informant in 2001. It wasn’t until much later in 2003 and 2004 that Mathews tried to persuade me to accept the status and even then he did not tell me or my lawyer that he had already done it.

And Mathews was also forced to admit in court in the summer of 2004 that many of the statements he had made about me in a March 2004 affidavit were untrue. The affidavit trumpeted 686 contacts I’d had with the Mounties; he clarified this to say these were mostly media references and that the actual contacts I had with RCMP officers were very few—perhaps six to eight. He admitted he had the information I gave the police from other journalists. He admitted it was public information. He admitted it was inconsequential to the investigation. He admitted it was not the RCMP’s decision to lift my status as an informant as he had earlier stated—but my decision, taken as soon as I found out what had happened.

But what is really important in all this is that neither William Kaplan nor Philip Mathias broke the stories of the Airbus money. CBC producer Harvey Cashore’s team at *the fifth estate* and Germany’s *Der Spiegel* were the first on the story and the CBC developed the entire money trail through German sources. Harvey and I published it in our 2001 book, *The Last Amigo*. We detailed the money Schreiber gave Mulroney including its source and its trail through numbered Swiss accounts to emerge as the “Britan” account. What we were missing was indeed a scoop for Kaplan—Mulroney’s admission that he took the cash.

STEVIE CAMERON
TORONTO

Stevie Cameron is, as she described herself in *The Globe and Mail*, a “sideshow” in the overall story. The book has quite a bit to say about a growing culture of court secrecy in this country—a threat to democracy. However, the important story is Mulroney and the cash—a story that the *National Post* killed and that I revealed, with considerable assistance from *The Globe and Mail*.

Notably, *Globe* editor-in-chief Edward Greenspon was pilloried for only one part of the series—that in which I outed Stevie Cameron as a coded RCMP agent. Circling of the wagons by journalists is just one reason so much of the book is devoted to her; the more important reason is that the matter of the cash payments to Mulroney is far less