

“Gift Books”

From Squaw Tit to Whorehouse Meadow: How Maps Name, Claim, and Inflame

Mark Monmonier

The University of Chicago Press

215 pages, \$27.08 cloth

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Oceans: An Illustrated Reference

Dorrik Stow

The University of Chicago Press

256 pages, \$58.85, cloth

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by Jeff Bursey

When I was young, an unexpected flooding of my family’s basement ruined, among other things, most of the childrens’ books, leaving untouched enough books to jam one shelf of a bookcase which was placed, with unswerving faith, in the basement of our next home. This, too, flooded, but didn’t cause quite the same damage. On the shelves of that bookcase rested a miscellany of Ellery Queen mysteries, *Reader’s Digests*, a small selection from the How & Why library, and the six-volume *Golden Book Picture Atlas of the World*, which came out in the early 1960s. This last was endlessly fascinating to me at the age of eleven or twelve. The volume on Africa, for example, told me of that continent’s climates and customs, and provided its rail and air routes. From repeated reading, the names of the countries became engraved on my mind: Voltaic Republic, Spanish Sahara, Malagasy Republic. Unfortunately, this reading took place in the early-1970s, so I was well behind the changes that took place after decolonization. It took time to realize this. In the meantime, a fondness for maps had taken root.

Mark Monmonier and Dorrik Stow don’t talk much about themselves, but I assume they have liked maps since they were children. There is a wealth of material in each of these books. Monmonier’s will appeal to anyone who wants to know the genesis of place names and how controversial they can be, while Stow’s overview of the oceans, their features and their inhabitants, is comprehensive without being dreary.

After a concise preface, which provides, among other things, definitions of toponym (“place name”) and toponymy (“the study of geographic names”), we come to an arresting line that opens the first chapter of *From Squaw Tit to Whorehouse Meadow*. “Someday soon map collectors will discover cartographic insults.” Why?

“Their inherent appeal to collectors is twofold: growing scarcity and intriguing anecdotes. Never a huge share of the national cartographic heritage, map sheets with offensive names become harder to find as government mapmakers, embarrassed by their unwitting role in the social construction of race and ethnicity, rename features and issue new editions.”

Monmonier chooses the use of the word *squaw*, used in place names throughout the United States, to show why battles are fought over names which please some and antagonize others. “A key obstacle to changing a name like Squaw Peak [or Squaw Tit Peak, Squaw Tits, and other variations] is finding an acceptable substitute.” Here bureaucracy steps in. A state may suggest a change after receiving complaints, or for other reasons, but the name has to be accepted by the U.S. Board of Geographic Names. The ten ways geographic features get named in the U.S. are described clearly, with anecdotes and maps illustrating the procedures states must go through. (The abundance of maps and their judicious use are great strengths of this book.) Apart from *squaw*, place names that included the words *Jap*, *Nigger*, *Negro* and *Chink* have also been changed over time.

The second chapter discusses the origins of gazetteers and the field of cartographic studies, describing how maps were made and how that process, as well as the maps themselves, have become more advanced with technological progress. In chapter three Monmonier demonstrates how controversies over formerly acceptable names are not easily put to rest. One example here is a set of names from New York State that include *wap* as the first syllable, which an overeager bureaucrat deemed offensive to Italian-Americans. However, the names commemorate the Wappinger Indians, some of whom fought for the colonists during the Revolutionary War. A rose is a rose is a rose until anxiety over political correctness causes a civil servant to say otherwise.

Purging names deemed offensive on ethnic grounds is much easier than replacing names that include body parts. This problem is addressed in chapter four. Its first map lists states with “mammary-based toponyms”, in Monmonier’s wording, while two comparative maps indicate how Oregon’s Whorehouse Meadow became, for a time, Naughty Girl Meadow. (The meadow is located near Honeymoon Lake.) Residents disliked the change, and perhaps the downsizing, so Whorehouse was reinstated. “Local loyalty to off-color place names is best exemplified,” writes Monmonier, “by Dildo, Newfoundland... In 1985 Robert Elford... collected nearly four hundred signatures on a petition asking the provincial government to change the name. Elford... backed off after neighbors who liked the name started ridiculing him in public and calling him at home.” Looking out on Spread Eagle Bay, Dildo is content with being risqué. Brand loyalty was also present in 1940 in Swastika, Ontario, when residents tore down a sign renaming their community in honour of Churchill, and posted one that read “To Hell with Hitler. We had the swastika first.”

Chapter five deals with commemorative naming, and the problems a proposed name can create, whether that name is intended to honour an individual or a community. Chapter six takes an international perspective on these same difficulties, using various examples: should the sea between the Koreas and Japan be called the Sea of Japan, the East Sea, Eastern Sea, Corea Sea, or something else; should Macedonia be the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; should we use the name Burma or Myanmar; and what about the West Bank, a name returned to in the next chapter, “Erasures.” As Monmonier shows here, international relations are aggravated when “countries covet the same territory,” and his examples include Kashmir, the Greek-Turkish division of Cyprus, and the disputes over names in Israel. One commentator Monmonier quotes describes these cases as “verbal toponym warfare.”

Chapter eight begins on the street level and aims for the stars, taking in Antarctica, the features under oceans, and our solar system along the way. Monmonier says: “Essential for identifying places, geographic names possess a symbolic power that can inflame as well as claim.” *From Squaw Tit to Whorehouse Meadow* amply demonstrates that, and tells readers

much about this and other topics. The end notes are well laid out and informative, though I would have preferred to have had them as footnotes.

Dorrik Stow's book deserves an embarrassing amount of praise. Magnificently designed, *Oceans* is a reference book that offers clearly written text that is never upstaged by the book's many illustrations, photographs, high-definition imagery, diagrams, drawings, and charts. One example of the useful relationship between text and graphics can be found on pages 152-153, where a colourful representation of the tree of life—broken into kingdoms, dotted with helpful drawings, and placed on two timelines—is surrounded by a chart listing taxonomic classification, a set of key terms, including domain and archaea (such lists are found throughout), a photograph of tunicates, text on the diversity of life, and sidebar paragraphs that give additional information related to the tree of life.

Oceans is broken into three main sections—Ocean Systems, Ocean Maps, and Ocean Life. Each chapter in the first and third section is engrossing. The five chapters of section one start with plate tectonics, explaining, to name only a few things, the Mohorovič discontinuity and the creation of ocean ridges, before moving on to discuss oceans of the past and the earliest formation of the oceans that exist now, the interaction of salt, sea, and the sun, ocean layers, weather systems, abyssal storms, and renewable marine energy. Detailed pages devoted to ocean maps follow. Section three begins with a photograph of a coelacanth (dinosaur enthusiasts will enjoy this book), and proceeds to discuss, in the next five chapters, the origins of life, toxic red tides, coral reefs, adaptations of marine life at the various oceanic levels, and the health of the oceans. Little in the last chapter makes for happy reading, as one is taken through the dark reality of overfishing, marine pollution, habitat destruction, and the high probability of extinction faced by many marine species.

Yet Stow is also cautiously optimistic. He writes about the “blue revolution”, an example of which is mariculture (“marine fish farming”), which has increased the availability of fish product, and the greater attention now paid to climate change and dumping at sea. Here Stow's controlled tone leaves him, and he states his belief that science will bring about a major transformation once the global community realises that the oceans are undergoing severe changes. “...[T]he Age of the Ocean will see the demise of the nation state. It will finally be recognized that issues of world health, nutrition, energy, and climate, as well as the eradication of world poverty, warfare, and religious divisions, can only be managed by cooperation rather than competition. Earth itself may ultimately be renamed ‘Ocean.’” It's hard to envision such change in the near future, but Stow certainly gives the reader something to think about.

Thanks to the hard work of the production team, *Oceans* is an essential book that captures the latest in ocean science and turns it into interesting, comprehensible prose. The book is appropriate for all types of readers. *Oceans*, and *From Squaw Tit to Whorehouse Meadow* can be revisited and enjoyed for many years, and would therefore make excellent gifts.

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