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## Landscapes of Fraud: Mission Tumacacori, the Baca Float, and the Betrayal of the O'odham, by Thomas E. Sheridan

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Landscapes of Fraud: Mission Tumacácori, the Baca Float, and the Betrayal of the O'odham.* By Thomas E. Sheridan. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006. Pp. 303. \$35.00 cloth.

There is a story etched in the landscape of the Upper Santa Cruz River Valley in southern Arizona, writes Thomas Sheridan in *Landscapes of Fraud*. From the carefully preserved Jesuit Mission Tumacácori to the suburban sprawl of modern Anglo Rio Rico, the human spaces and structures layered on this land embody the dreams of the successive waves of human societies that colonized the valley.

As a whole, the landscape tells of a transformation from land use directed toward sustaining and reproducing human communities to one directed toward generating profit. While the ambitious land speculators who drove this transformation never succeeded in turning their golden visions into profitable realities, their machinations replaced the physical, ecological landscape with an artificial geography and destroyed the land-based communities of the valley.

Sheridan relates this narrative in straightforward and accessible prose. The perspective he offers is that of an anthropologist and a critical geographer following in the traditions of David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre, whose work he draws on. Like those scholars, Sheridan begins with the premise that human societies do not merely construct social relationships—they also create physical spaces that manifest those social orderings and power relations. By studying those physical spaces, we can better understand the society that created them. Sheridan takes that premise and applies it to the historical construction of space in this small Southwestern valley.

*Landscapes of Fraud* is divided into two major sections, "Landscapes of Community" and "Landscapes of Fraud." The division splits the history of the valley into two distinct eras: before the United States acquired the land from Mexico in 1853, and after.

The first section opens with an anthropological analysis of the O'odham Indians' creation story and goes on to describe how O'odham communities lived prior to first contact with Europeans. As Sheridan tells it, the spaces of the O'odham were constructed along natural watershed lines, and their subsistence patterns followed the seasonal rhythms of the Sonoran desert environment. This way of life was forcefully altered when Jesuit missionaries colonized the region. The Jesuits artificially partitioned the land temporally as well as physically by dividing the seasons into workweeks and the landscape into mission fields, household fields, and common lands around the Mission Tumacácori. Sheridan goes on to describe the changes wrought by the coming of the Franciscans, the Spanish

military forces, and finally the Hispanic settlers who established agrarian communities across the valley.

Unfortunately, this first section of *Landscapes of Fraud* does too much and too little; it sweeps over a vast palate of history from the pre-Colombian era all the way through the U.S. acquisition of the region without spending much time analyzing the changes it describes. The prose alternates between lyrical, richly textured descriptions of O'odham land use and much choppy historical sequences in which great casts of European colonizers move rapidly across the region. The first half of *Landscapes of Fraud* seems to be included more to set the stage for the second half than as a fully developed analysis in its own right.

As a result, the book does not really come into its own until the second section, which covers the last century and a half of land use in the Santa Cruz Valley. Sheridan wraps up the O'odham's role in the story with the final loss of their Tumacácori lands in 1848 and their flight north to the current location of the O'odham nation. Sheridan then shifts his focus to the clash between the agrarian Hispanic settlers, who managed the land as a communal resource, and the Anglo speculators, who viewed it as a commodity. The speculators swept in from the north, spinning fabulous tales of the agricultural abundance and mineral wealth of the region to lure potential investors. To facilitate such investments, the speculators converted the landscape into an artificial "financescape" by carving it up into a grid of imaginary townsites and farmsites that could be traded for a profit in the turbulent boom and bust financial markets of the day. This partitioning of the land went even further than that of the missionaries, as it was completely divorced from the natural constraints and geography of the landscape.

Sheridan illustrates his discussion of these concepts with the history of the Baca Float land grant No. 3, a land claim located just west of Mission Tumacácori. Established through the legal chicanery of land grant lawyers, the claim displaced whole communities of Hispanic farmers and homesteaders in the Santa Cruz valley. After this land grab was blessed by the courts, the speculators who had acquired it converted it into a dude ranch playground for the rich and famous. In the postwar boom of the 1950s, the grant passed to the real estate developers of the "Great Arizona Land Rush," who built the Rio Rico suburb on a foundation of corporate crime and fraud.

*Landscapes of Fraud* is at its best when Sheridan pulls together the threads of his analysis in the book's introduction and the summations at the close of each chapter. While brief, these passages offer the clearest explication of how each stage of the region's land use reflects the ideology and vision of the culture dominating it at that moment in history. Despite Sheridan's best intentions, too much of the book is spent relating a linear, historical narrative rather than drawing the connections between the

historic events, the creation of space, and the understanding we should glean from those connections.

Regardless, *Landscapes of Fraud* offers a valuable perspective for students of the Southern Arizona–Northern Sonora border region and of Southwestern history generally. While it focuses on the history of one small river valley, the story illustrates the larger forces at play throughout the American Southwest as it was transformed from an agrarian to an industrial capitalist system. The questions Sheridan raises regarding how we use the land and how those choices are rooted in our cultural values are increasingly urgent as we strive to achieve a more sustainable society. Toward that end, *Landscapes of Fraud* succeeds in tracing all the follies and missteps of the past, illuminating our history so that we may avoid repeating it.

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***From Walden to Wall Street: Frontiers of Conservation Finance.*** Edited by James N. Levitt. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2005. Pp. 263. \$64.95 cloth; \$39.95 paper

*From Walden to Wall Street: Frontiers of Conservation Finance* assembles essays by conservation program directors and policy advisors that describe the diverse financial strategies conservationists are devising to protect privately owned lands from development and destruction. Editor James Levitt presents this optimistic collection as part and parcel of the characteristically American enterprise of preserving natural areas for the public good. The book's consistently pragmatic "how-to" tone should restore some hope in anxious conservationists that ingenious professionals are hard at work preserving private lands, even while the federal government extends only "tepid" protections to public lands. It may even inspire the financially undereducated conservationist to consider exploring creative economic avenues. Despite this value as a cheerleading primer on private conservation possibilities, however, *From Walden to Wall Street* provides only an incomplete answer to the obvious question of how far such efforts can go in achieving more than piecemeal ecosystem protection.

In his opening essay, Levitt dubs innovative conservation financing "An American Tradition." He recounts the pioneering conservation efforts of some of America's icons, from John Winthrop's negotiations to save Boston Common, through Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln each inventing a form of public land "trust" or "grant," to Theodore Roosevelt's funding of the first national bird sanctuaries. Presenting these heroes as precursors to contemporary conservation strategies allows Levitt to tie