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Camping Grounds: Public Nature in American Life from the Civil War to the Occupy Movement by Phoebe S. K. Young
(review)

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Camping Grounds: Public Nature in American Life from the Civil War to the Occupy Movement. By Phoebe S. K. Young. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. 432. \$34.95 hardcover; ebook)

In the 2021 film *Nomadland*, there is a scene in which Frances McDormand's character, Fern, works a seasonal job as a campground host at Badlands National Park, picking up campers' trash and restoring electricity for a family celebrating a birthday at the campground. It is a quiet scene, but the juxtaposition between Fern and the other campers is compelling: though they are surrounded by the same scenery, sleeping in the same campground, and making homes in similar vehicles, their experiences are sharply different. Such complicated meanings and experiences of camping in the United States are at the heart of Phoebe S. K. Young's excellent *Camping Grounds: Public Nature in American Life from the Civil War to the Occupy Movement*. The book makes no claim to a comprehensive history of camping as recreational activity. Instead, Young is interested in how camping represents the intersection of two central ideas in American social and political thought: "public nature" and the "social contract" between a government and its people (p. 5). By exploring key moments in the history of camping in the United States, Young argues that camping has regularly served as a site to debate and renegotiate the meaning of both concepts.

To make this argument, Young draws on a wealth of prior scholarship and on primary sources ranging from legal decisions to outdoor equipment advertisements. Central to her analysis are outdoor publications, especially magazines and books, which demonstrate how the meanings that Americans associate with camping—and how they have policed its boundaries—have changed. Young suggests that not only is camping a critical site of political and social meaning but that, over time, politicians and participants alike have increasingly privileged a consumer-based recreational use of public nature over functional or political ones. The result is a fascinating look at the role of camping in U.S. history that will prove insightful not only for readers interested in recreation and environmental history, but also those seeking nuanced histories of capitalism, political protest, environmental justice, labor, and more.

Young organizes *Camping Grounds* into three chronological parts, each with a pair of chapters that offer studies in contrasting understandings of camping. In the first section, Young opens with the role of camping as a means for Civil War veterans to make sense of their wartime experiences and to reunite amid the socially unstable, industrializing world of the postbellum United States. Next, she turns to John Muir's evolving relationship with camping and his ultimate celebration of

Yosemite as “an outdoor home,” an attitude that would help to shape the idea of “a new form of public nature . . . a respite from productive life rather than the basis of it” (p. 90). Although these participants’ objectives differed, in each case camping represented a way of performing citizenship on public land and grappling with modernity. The book’s second section contrasts a chapter on tramp culture and the functional camping of migrant laborers with one that focuses on the development of what Young terms the “camper’s republic” (p. 135). As camping’s popularity grew, recreational campers deliberately distinguished themselves from those who camped out of necessity. Likewise, even as the government policed the presence of transient campsites, it embraced a commitment to meet popular demand for outdoor recreational infrastructure. Included in this chapter is a fascinating exploration of the relationship between camping and the built environment: the invention of the “loop campground” so ubiquitous today, designed to simultaneously protect natural spaces and make camping more accessible. The two chapters of the final section explore the growing back-to-nature movement of the 1960s and 1970s, as a new generation of campers redefined the ideal camping experience as one more closely connected to the “authentic” outdoors of the backcountry in rejection of the middle-class family loop campground, and the role of camping in political protests in the second half of the twentieth century, from the Poor People’s Campaign to Vietnam War protests to 2011’s Occupy Movement. Young illustrates not only that camping was a tool of protest efforts, but that debates over allowing protestors to camp, especially on National Park Service land in Washington, D.C., served as arguments not only about the definition of camping but also over the relationship between government, citizens, protestors, and land.

Young elegantly incorporates complicated, interwoven histories into a clear narrative. She includes analyses of the complicated relationships between race and camping, especially for African Americans for whom, over time, camping has served variously as a means of self-emancipation, a site of exclusion from explicitly or implicitly segregated spaces, a tool for protest, and a form of recreation. Likewise, she demonstrates that the development of recreational camping depended on the removal and exclusion of Indigenous peoples from land and the rejection of the legitimacy of Native relationships to the landscape. Young also explores the intersection between gender and camping, whether in assertions of camping as a restoration of masculinity in the late nineteenth century, in the potential to explore new gender roles in the non-traditional space of the campsite, or in the reinforcement of traditional roles as campers sought to recreate outdoor vacation

versions of middle-class homes. The relationship between labor and camping—one of the areas in which the boundary between recreation and function is most often blurred—is also thoughtfully explored, from the camps of migrant laborers during the Great Depression to the more recent trend of transient laborers, like *Nomadland's* Fern, who rely on camping equipment and public land to enable precarious employment. The one element that the analysis seems to lack is a sense of how Americans' camping habits relate to those in other parts of the world. Though *Camping Grounds* is not meant to be a comparative history, it might strengthen Young's already persuasive argument to understand whether camping in the United States has differed from similar activities elsewhere. That said, this is more of an invitation for further research than a true critique.

Young's epilogue clearly illustrates that the place of camping in national discourse continues into the present, from the advertising campaigns of companies such as REI and Patagonia and alarm about "Nature Deficit Disorder" that suggest camping is inherently physically and mentally beneficial, to the public health concerns about homelessness and tents amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Far from being an apolitical, instinctive activity, Young argues, camping past and present "serves as a bellwether for changes in the social contract and how we envision the role of public nature" (p. 303).

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Equality at the Ballot Box: Votes for Women on the Northern Great Plains. Edited by Lori Ann Lahlum and Molly P. Rozum. (Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2019. Pp. 300. \$34.95 hardback)

During the past decade, there was a flurry of activity in many states in anticipation of the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment. Scholars, public historians, educators, and members of the general public collaborated in the process of translating and disseminating academic research to a broader public audience, encouraging people to consider their own communities and do their own research. This process is resulting in many excellent projects and a deluge of new information at a time when the "master narrative" of U.S. suffrage was already overdue for a paradigm