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## Book review: Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism

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# Reviews

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## *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism*

By Char Miller

Island Press, Washington, D.C., 2001. Photographs, notes, index.  
468 pages. \$28.00 cloth.

Reviewed by James A. Pritchard  
*Iowa State University, Ames*

**I**N MAY OF 1911, citizens of Cordova, Alaska, led by members of the chamber of commerce, stormed the wharves to dump anthracite coal into the waters of Controller Bay and burned an effigy of Gifford Pinchot, whom local journalists labeled a man who “thinks more of trees than people” (p. 206). Throughout his life, Pinchot remained in the midst of debates over natural resources. In *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism*, historian Char Miller introduces us to an unexpected Pinchot, a character more malleable than previous accounts have allowed. Miller’s portrait provides a startling contrast to the image of Pinchot the rationalist, the efficient administrator introducing vertical filing systems to the Bureau of Forestry and (as rumor had it) nailing desk drawers shut to prevent unanswered mail.

Pinchot has been accused of practicing dry-goods forestry (establishing a professional over-emphasis on timber production), but Miller contends that he “may well have built his later studies in forestry’s scientific language upon an already established aesthetic vocabulary” (p. 109–10). Following his early work alongside landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead at George Vanderbilt’s Biltmore Estate in North Carolina, Pinchot became more than the architect of tree plantations, remaining intellectually open throughout his life. His revisions of *The Training of a Forester*, first published in 1914 and issued in

its fourth and final edition in 1937, for example, reveal that he “had grafted ecological insights onto utilitarian methodologies” (p. 328). Pinchot derided “industrial forestry” and prodded the Washington chapter of the Society of American Foresters toward supporting higher forestry standards. Significantly, he displayed a “remarkable ability to expose himself to, and change in the face of, fresh thinking” (p. 327).

Miller appropriately emphasizes Pinchot’s passionate devotion to the public interest, a commitment as much moral and personal as it was political. Pinchot actually enjoyed political brawls. Teddy Roosevelt remarked that Pinchot “loved to spend his whole strength . . . in battling for a high ideal” (p. 176). The Ballinger-Pinchot controversy — a fracas that centered on “differing conceptions of the authority of the executive branch” (p. 207) to enact the sort of conservation legislation that angered the men on the docks at Cordova, some of whom were involved in land fraud schemes — cost Pinchot his position as head of the U.S. Forest Service, yet Secretary of the Interior Richard Ballinger and President William Howard Taft also fell as a result.

Miller suggests that Pinchot’s engagement in “reciprocal sparring” initiated a political dance that continues among conservationists to the present day. Internecine squabbles were essential to the development and success of the early conservation move-

ment. Pinchot understood politics as a dramatic art that utilized narrative and an interpretive agenda. He split with his mentors and colleagues, most visibly in 1908 when Bernard Fernow, John Muir, and Charles Sprague Sargent were not invited to the Conference on the Conservation of Natural Resources, an oversight as much psychologically charged as it was politically motivated.

Pinchot's marriage to Cornelia Bryce in 1914 supported his journey toward the political left. He tied the legitimacy of forestry to social reforms, defended public ownership of national forests, and promoted state regulation of private forests. By 1932, he believed that nationalizing forested lands was the only acceptable way to rehabilitate woodlands and secure social justice. While governor of Pennsylvania in 1933, Pinchot called out the National Guard to protect striking coal workers from company guards. Cornelia

Pinchot organized hosiery workers, remaining "an ardent champion of the poor, women, and the working class" (p. 349). Political activism, suggests Miller, "kept Pinchot ideologically fresh" (p. 317).

In recent conflicts over public forests, both sides have attempted to claim Pinchot. Proponents of timber production have "deliberately narrowed the range of Pinchot's ideas" (p. 358), missed the fact that his ideas on clear-cutting changed over time, and failed to see (as Pinchot knew) that public opinion matters. Pinchot has remained a "galvanizing force" whose legacy lies "in his greening," a product of his "intellectual openness and moral engagement" (p. 376).

Miller's biography is a masterful treatment of a complex character. Written with verve and insight and richly illustrated with anecdotes and photographs, this book deserves the widest possible audience.

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## *Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island*

By Daniel W. Clayton

University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 2000. Illustrations, photographs, maps, notes, bibliography, index. 352 pages. \$85.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper (Canadian).

Reviewed by William G. Robbins  
*Oregon State University, Corvallis*

**I**N THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, first Spanish and then British and American sailing ships began touching landfall along North America's northwest littoral. In search of booty and the mythical Northwest Passage, those early voyagers were in the process of creating new geographies of commerce and spheres of imperialism. At the same moment, they were also making known to an expanding Atlantic world of capitalist entrepreneurs the bright prospects for market exchanges in the North Pacific. Daniel Clayton's *Islands of Truth* examines Enlightenment scientific explorations along the west coast of Vancouver Island, market exchange strategies between European traders and Native villagers, and the nation-states engaged in imperial contests for control. The book is divided into three parts —

"Spaces of European Exploration" (Captain James Cook and Vancouver Island), "Geographies of Capital" (Native power relations and the sea otter trade), and "Circulating Knowledge and Power" (Captain George Vancouver, the Nootka Crisis, and the imposition of imperial control).

Following the assessments of Paul Carter, Gananath Obeyesekere, and other scholars, Clayton interrogates older interpretations that describe Britannia's Captain James Cook as the quintessential Enlightenment figure, a scientist and humanitarian who sailed the ocean highways in the quest for disinterested scientific knowledge. Less apparent, but perhaps more important, are the imperial and economic motives behind Cook's voyages and his lasting historical influence in shaping "a broader Euro-