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A Review of “Civic Discipline: Geography in America, 1860–1890”

Karen M. Morin. Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2011. xi and 258 pp., 28 illustrations. \$89.95 hardcover (ISBN 978-1-4094-0143-8).

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Karen Morin's *Civic Discipline: Geography in America, 1860–1890* examines nineteenth-century American geography practices outside of academia and the contributions of Charles P. Daly, New York judge and American Geographical Society (AGS) president. Daly was not an academic geographer yet had tremendous influence over public geographic knowledge, impacting the actions of many actors on many stages. *Civic Discipline* is not a biography but rather “a sociology of Charles Daly's geography—a social geography,” illuminating an area frequently ignored in geography's history: the ways in which Daly and the AGS impacted the American geographical imagination (p. 3).

Morin begins by delineating the relationship between the AGS and commerce and sketching out a brief biography of Daly. Daly was admitted to the New York Bar at twenty-three, appointed Judge of the Court of Common Pleas at twenty-eight, and served continuously until he retired at seventy, with a reputation as an “incorruptible judge” (p. 15). A meeting with Alexander von Humboldt led Daly to become “fired about geography,” and join the newly founded AGS. Daly served as AGS President for thirty-five years (1864–1899), giving popular and well-attended annual AGS addresses on the “state of geographical knowledge” (pp. 3, 17, 45–46). Through his lectures, writings, and legal decisions, Daly popularized geography, pulling together the seemingly disparate strands of geography, empire, nationalism, and business.

Morin focuses on Daly's influence on the professional field, on its epistemology, and on its praxes, organizing the book around five “spaces” where he impacted geographical knowledge and practice: gendered geographic practices, urban social reform, American empire, Arctic exploration, and Congo colonization (p. 18). She begins with the shift in geography from statistical methods to exploration and the impacts of notions of masculinity on the knowledge produced. In its early days, the AGS was the “American Geographical and Statistical Society,” with statistics being important as “agents of empire” (pp. 32, 37). As geography moved away from statistics, geographers became associated with the “hard bodied” explorers, while still advocating commercial geography and propagating nineteenth-century masculine ideals. The tying of geography to this masculinity united “hard facts” and “hard bodies” (p. 54).

Morin then examines Daly's activism in his home—New York—and, more broadly, to advance American interests. Believing that geography should contribute to the nation's betterment, Daly worked broadly for the “public good” and helped shape the city. She links Daly's practice with nineteenth-century reform ideology, exploring his motivation as he engaged in early urban geography. As an agent of empire himself, he advocated for American commercial expansion, working to advance railroad development by the Northern Pacific Railway and canal efforts in Nicaragua through geographical, legal, and diplomatic channels (pp. 93–94). Daly was instrumental in synthesizing information and making it available to the public, but his own role was complicated. He was simultaneously a stockholder in the railway and a canal company, in what Morin describes as “the close connection between the geopolitical and the ‘geopersonal’” (p. 115).

Finally, Morin turns to Daly's role in Arctic exploration and Congo colonization. Here, Daly was the armchair geographer, studying and lecturing about places where he never set foot. Arctic and African exploration made significant news in the late nineteenth century and Daly often waded in as the "official geographer" or "jurist-geographer," capturing the public's imagination with its dramatic tales but also with its commercial promise (pp. 128–30). In the Arctic, the AGS was actively involved with promoting certain expeditions over others, emphasizing the scientific benefits of Arctic exploration and geography's central role to these sciences. Daly and AGS's affiliation with Arctic expeditions underlined the importance of this work as "valuable civic and national enterprise" (p. 155). With the Congo, King Leopold II of Brussels invited Daly's involvement in African "development" in 1876 (p. 169). Word of Leopold's atrocities began to leak out by 1889, but Leopold's leveraging of American corporate interests, aided by Daly, resulted in benefits for American businessmen, many of whom had AGS connections.

Morin concludes her social geography by reflecting on the absence of Daly and civic geography from American geographical history. How did such a popular figure in American geography in the nineteenth century become "unpopular"? She suggests that it is perhaps because of his practice of popular and civic geography, appealing to mass audiences and practiced outside of higher education (p. 205). Daly did not teach, did not hold a university position, and, therefore, did not have a significant role in shaping the emerging academic discipline, the subject emphasized in most histories of geography. But to ignore Daly is to miss a significant aspect of nineteenth-century geography: the many geographers outside of academia who shaped the American landscape and its geographical imagination.

Morin does a remarkable job defining the practice of civic geography and excavating the contributions of Daly. Through her extensive archival research, she constructs the realm of nineteenth-century geography and how Daly and the AGS were major players in shaping geographic knowledge, particularly that of the movers and shakers in New York and Washington. I appreciate her social geography approach and its highlighting of Daly's involvement in national and global affairs. I find it entirely appropriate that a geographer would use a spatial approach, his spaces of impact, to examine the influence of another geographer and the AGS. A mere biography would not bring out, nor perhaps allow, the analysis that Morin conducts on Daly's words and actions.

But this leads to my sole criticism: the need for closer analysis of Daly's rhetoric. In particular, it would be very interesting to see how he varied his rhetoric according to his audience, as most speakers do. A close analysis of one case, such as the Nicaraguan canal where he played several roles, could be enlightening. Daly promoted the canal through a variety of forums: Morin states that he played the "neutral scientist" and that his rhetoric favored the evidence (pp. 110–11, 115). But when Daly spoke to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1888, he was accused of lobbying for his own company. Was he no longer the "neutral scientist"? Or did audience knowledge of his financial stake lead to questioning his "neutrality" (p. 113)? Analysis of the text, if it is available in his papers or in the *Congressional Record*, would perhaps shed light on this. I am also intrigued by the numerous times he was called before Congress, which receives the least attention in the text. In fairness, Morin acknowledges that her work "barely scratched the surface" of Daly's connections with the U.S. government (p. 116).

Overall, Morin's *Civic Discipline* is an outstanding contribution to the history of geography. It joins recent contributions, such as Neil Smith's biography of Isaiah Bowman and Carolyn Strange and Alison Bashford's biography of Griffith Taylor, in elucidating the contributions of great public geographers,

enriching our understanding of the broad practice of geography and opening our eyes to the tremendous impact of forgotten players, such as Daly and the AGS, on the American landscape.