



Landscapes of the Secular: Law, Religion, and American Sacred Space

Nicolas Howe

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“What does it mean to see the American landscape in a secular way?” asks Nicolas Howe at the outset of this innovative, ambitious, and wide-ranging book. It’s a surprising question because of what it implies: we usually *aren’t* seeing American landscapes through a non-religious lens, but rather as inflected by complicated, little-examined concepts of the sacred.

Fusing geography, legal scholarship, and religion in a potent analysis, Howe shows how seemingly routine questions about how to look at a sunrise or a plateau or how to assess what a mountain is both physically and ideologically, lead to complex arguments about the nature of religious experience and its implications for our lives as citizens. In American society—nominally secular but committed to permitting a diversity of religious beliefs and expressions—such questions become all the more fraught and can lead to difficult, often unsatisfying compromises regarding how to interpret and inhabit our public lands and spaces. A serious commitment to secularism, Howe shows, forces us to confront the profound challenges of true religious diversity in ways that often will have their ultimate expression in our built environment. This provocative exploration of some of the fundamental aspects of American life will help us see the land, law, and society anew.

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