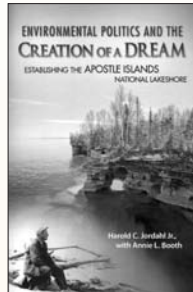


**Environmental Politics and the Creation of A Dream: Establishing the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore**

**Harold C. Jordahl Jr. with Annie L. Booth**

*(Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011, 399 p. Paper, \$24.95; e-book, \$19.95.)*



The Apostle Islands, a federally protected national lakeshore in Lake Superior near Bayfield, Wisconsin, is a place of magnificent scenery and tremendous natural allure that beckons thousands to its sandy beaches, rocky cliffs, cozy bays, and numerous lighthouses. Given its popularity and economic value to nearby communities, it is hard to imagine the long and tangled history that preceded its 1970 designation as a national lakeshore. It is that history that Harold Jordahl and Annie Booth set out to chronicle in this work. Jordahl, the book’s primary author, draws on his own involvement in the saga. His various positions in the Department of Resource Development in Wisconsin and, later, the Department of the Interior provided a front-seat view of the lengthy struggle.

The book’s early chapters provide a quick look at the history of the Apostles, taking note of native peoples who likely hunted and fished there, French and native trappers who searched for beaver and other species, and the commercial enterprises that began in the late 1800s, such as quarrying sand, harvesting trees, and fishing. While the islands were primarily used for these economic endeavors, a few people began to enjoy their beauty and opportunities for outdoor recreation. Here and there, summer cottages appeared, as did a resort on Sand Island, begun in 1894 by Sam Fifield. As the twentieth century progressed, nearby communities, such as Bayfield and Ashfield, became increasingly interested in the recreational and tourist potential of the islands. Interest rose as well within the National Park Service, which sought to expand its system beyond the great mountain parks of the West.

Of course, no vision of a federally owned and managed preserve for the Apostles could have come to fruition without substantial leadership. Jordahl, who worked closely with the major figures promoting the lakeshore, is at his best in revealing the important roles of Wisconsin Governor and Senator Gaylord Nelson, Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, NPS director George Hartzog, and other federal and state officials and activists. Jordahl recalls the important role of the Wisconsin press in promoting the lakeshore, most notably that of Gordon MacQuarrie, an outdoor reporter for the *Milwaukee Journal*. He also reveals the efforts of those who

opposed the lakeshore, such as Ernest Swift, a director of the Wisconsin Conservation Division, members of the South Shore Property Owners’ Association centered in Ashland, and local hunters and anglers who worried that their traditional spots would be off limits in the new preserve.

The book offers an insider’s view of the individuals and interest groups who became involved in the creation of the lakeshore and of the tangled politics and frequently difficult processes entailed. Jordahl recounts in much detail the slow, often lurching, way that the lakeshore gained support while also pointing out the many setbacks. He makes clear that, despite rising enthusiasm for a national lakeshore, virtually every step along the way was fraught with difficulties, given the slow workings of state and federal bureaucracies, the legislative process, and the need to address any number of contentious matters. One of the most contentious centered on the difficulties of creating the lakeshore on Red Cliff and Bad River tribal lands and areas where native people were accustomed to harvesting wild rice as well as hunting and fishing.

The book is somewhat awkwardly constructed. The first two parts (six chapters) relate the long battle over creating the lakeshore. These chapters provide some discussion of politics and the roles of various individuals and groups. Then, in part three, the authors lay out six more chapters that delve much more deeply into different facets of topics they have just covered, including the political context of the battle, the role of local citizens, the media, the state, and native peoples. One wonders why these parts of the book were not integrated. A final section offers “Reflections” on the lakeshore and its popularity and management today.

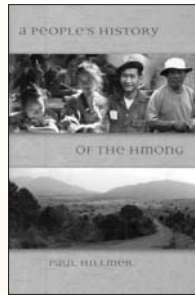
Given its detail, the book will probably have limited appeal to general readers interested in the beauty or recreational features of the islands. However, the work has much value as a study of how an area in the national park system came into being; how local, state, federal, and Native American interests were part of the mix; and how a wide variety of interests converged, tangled, and ultimately decided to make the lakeshore a reality. Political scientists, natural resource managers, and environmental historians are among those who will find the book most helpful.

*Reviewed by Mark Harvey, professor of history at North Dakota State University, Fargo. A specialist in environmental history, he is the author of A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement (1994) and Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the Wilderness Act (2005). He is currently at work on a study of the western American historian and conservation activist, Bernard DeVoto.*

## A People's History of the Hmong

Paul Hillmer

(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010, 327 p. Cloth, \$27.95; e-book, \$22.99.)



This is an ambitious book about the Hmong people: their culture in Laos, their experiences during the CIA's "Secret War" there, and their movement to the United States, a story that mostly unfolds in Minnesota. It is a difficult book to evaluate due to its geographical range, methodological heterodoxy, and thin, unsatisfying thesis. It is not, as its title claims, a "people's history" in the sense of Howard Zinn's work: a sweeping narration of a population told from a non-elite perspective. Rather, it is a single-serving meal for U.S. audiences about the Hmong since 1945: a sandwich made from the bread of old-fashioned immigration history—"The United States has always been a nation of immigrants" (236)—surrounding a filling of military operations and war. Eschewing a more rigorous framework of U.S. empire building based on the last 20 years of Asian American and other historiography, the book's military history goes down hard.

Hillmer's argument, based on conventional research and his own oral interviews, is that the "presence of the Hmong in Western countries today is a direct result of [a] gradual but intentional decision by some to benefit from French colonialism." (46) Hmong fate was an "accident of geography" (48) abetted by military, Peace Corps, intelligence, and missionary foreigners who kept noticing how well the Hmong knew their local terrain and how, with a little instruction, they could be persuaded to pick up arms and drop bombs in the battles that were largely waged by outsiders.

If Hillmer only acknowledges the anti-communist thrust of U.S. diplomacy and covert action in Laos, the Hmong themselves seem aware of this country's colonial history: When faced with relocation to the U.S. in the 1970s they requested to be sent to "an Indian reservation or Eskimo area" (202). Insights like these—about transnational historical consciousness or shifting vocabularies of belonging, family, destiny, divinity—are undeveloped. This neglect is disappointing; by listening carefully to peoples' stories—which are always in several degrees of translation, even if in the same language—profound and structuring dimensions of a person's worldview can become evident. But Hillmer's use of oral interviews is limited to embellishment or illustration. The "people's" stories do not drive the narrative of the book, which remains tied to an "America's Longest War" framework. Even the time Hillmer takes with Hmong leaders like Touby Lyfoung, Lo Faydang, and Vang Pao lacks depth. The

deeper stories of their ideological commitment and thinking remain offstage.

Though based on some 200 interviews conducted by the author, the book lacks the potentially destabilizing effect that oral history can have on "master narratives" like war or colonialism. Mostly, haplessness and opportunism explain historical events and personal decisions. Oral testimony that points to radically alternative readings of conflicts and events in Laos—like cosmic forces or complex relations of kin and courtship—is waved away in favor of more conventional explanations (44–45). In the war chapters, Western figures are portrayed with few incisive references to power relations. The oral narratives may or may not have been produced in the context of a colonial dynamic. Hillmer seems not to have asked this question, and so the words of the Hmong shadow rather than drive the narrative.

In the final chapter about experiences in the U.S., Hmong narrators' words generally validate Hillmer's immigration framework. Since he stresses "commonalities in the immigrant experience," it is no surprise that readers are told that some Hmong become "part of the American Dream" and "often forget their own family history." (237) This chapter contains riveting personal stories of success, trauma, and conflict. But I longed for a more nuanced, careful parsing of these stories. Hillmer asserts that in the U.S., the Hmong finally arrived "in a place they could call home" (249); I wanted to learn the Hmong word or words for home and how their understandings of these words may have changed over time and across place. Hillmer's naïve rhetorical question (251) concerning Hmong residential patterns and mutual-benefit associations—"how else would we ['we?'] have the ethnic neighborhoods that still exist today?"—reveals his stance. His reliance on the work of immigration historians in the 1980s, focused on Europeans, may be part of the problem. So, too, might be his admission that he "did not set out to write a book" (290) and offers this volume as an effort to help the Hmong not "let their history, their culture, and their language slip between their fingers," as his German heritage did. (9) Given such challenging and rich material, I wish Hillmer had engaged recent theoretical work in Asian American studies and transnational immigration history, much of which is produced and used effectively by oral historians.

*Reviewed by Patricia A. Schechter, professor of history at Portland State University, who was recognized by the Cambodian American Community of Oregon for her work on their award-winning documentary, "The OH Project: Surviving the Khmer Rouge Genocide." Her book Exploring the Decolonial Imaginary: Four Transnational Lives will appear in early 2012.*



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