

Richard W. Judd

Democratic Spaces: Land Preservation in New England, 1850–2010.

Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2023

ISBN: 978-1-62534-757-2 (PB) \$32.95. 304 pp.

Refuting the trend in environmental historiography that centres US national parks in histories of land preservation, Richard Judd argues in *Democratic Spaces* that New England was the ‘birthplace of community-based preservation’ in America (p. 4). To Judd, local land trusts that protect smaller ‘seemingly inconspicuous green spaces’ are, and have long been, a vital part in the broader American preservation movement (p. 4). In other words, this book is about how landscape architects, community organisers, and local communities sought to preserve green spaces of New England: the historic country estates, wildlife corridors, coastlines, and woods that define the US northeast’s environment and history. Judd’s work is strongest when discussing the twentieth century and reveals how the local land trust boom of post-WW2 America was rooted in over a century of US preservationist practice *and* survived the anti-environmental conservative backlash of the 1980s. Though his main argument is somewhat weaker when discussing the nineteenth century, this work is an excellent addition to the historiographies of US environmentalist and preservationist traditions.

Throughout the entire work, Judd emphasises three historic themes. First, ordinary people coordinated and managed land trusts to preserve nearby green spaces for wildlife habitat, recreation, regional personality, and historic structures. Second, land trusts became increasingly democratic over time as elite-coordinated land trusts for rural beautification shifted towards models where local communities founded and managed local land trusts in the twentieth century. Finally, the geographic size of local land trust preservation projects expanded over time, particularly after the 1950s, to the multi-organisational, coordinated management of thousands of acres of forest land and green space by coalitions of private and public organisations.

Judd introduces his method as a ground-up approach of analysis through the Trustees of Reservations Archives & Research Center in Sharon, Massachusetts and newspaper reports of the activities and accomplishments ‘of hundreds of local land trusts’ (p. 5). Though effectively utilised in the rest of the book, this method is somewhat absent in the book’s first chapter. Here, Judd presents more of an intellectual history of landscape design and the Art of Public Improvement that motivated the foundation of the influential Trustees of Public Reservations of later chapters. Reviewing the writings of educated nineteenth-century men like Frederick Jackson Dowling and Charles Sprague Sargent, Judd demonstrates that these individuals called for country estate owners and suburban landowners to blend art and nature to display their wealth and the rural beauty of New England. Judd then argues that such green spaces

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were democratic, based on the elites' allowance for the poor and working class to access these spaces. Here, Judd's use of the term 'democratic' is somewhat fraught; the landless had little to no say in the purpose of these green spaces. Even if elite prescriptions for green spaces produced parks urbanites love today, to forget historic imbalances of economic power forgets that wealthy Americans are not the entirety of US history. A history where land trusts began as undemocratic does not weaken the important, community-based work local land trusts performed in the twentieth century and today.

The second and third chapters fulfil Judd's argument that landscape trusts and preservation became increasingly democratic, where cross-class members of a community managed and initiated land trusts. Incorporated in 1891 by wealthy Bostonians by the activism of landscape architect Charles Eliot Jr., the Trustees of Public Reservations (later the Trustees of Reservations) systematised the acquisition of land for public access and preservation of pastoral and rural landscapes. Eliot's other point of activism, an urban park system in Boston, manifested as the Metropolitan Park Commission, was established in 1893. In the 1930s and 1940s, the TPR then began to cede control of park and reserve management to local volunteers. For example, although the TPR acquired the Old Manse historic site in 1939 near Concord, Massachusetts's historic battlefield, the TPR left repair decisions and work to the local committee and volunteers. Later trusts were founded from community activism and management, such as the World's End Reservation on Hingham Bay near Boston. The TPR acquired the site in 1967 only after a public campaign to preserve the bay by Hingham residents and neighbours as a recreational green space.

The final three chapters detail two dramatic shifts in land reserve practices. First, land trusts became increasingly locally coordinated and ecologically minded throughout New England. Second, alliances between land trusts and government institutions increasingly provided easements to property holders for the sake of preservation and acquired large swathes of forest acreage for the sake of preservation. Chapter four focuses on the work to protect rural spaces amidst suburbanisation and urbanisation, where local nonprofit trusts managed to expand their acreage of preservation even during and after the American anti-environmental backlash of the 1980s. These trusts increasingly combined historic and ecological preservation in ways that mediated other local community interests; organisations such as the Maine Farmland Trust that protected over thirty-four thousand acres of farmland with easements, thus providing funds for farmers to purchase new equipment, pay down debts, or potentially pass the farm to their children. Chapter five focuses on urban land trusts that galvanised coalitions of neighbourhoods to form urban-rural greenways, and the activism of urban gardeners who transformed Boston's empty land lots into community gardens. The chapter highlights the Dudley Street Neighbourhood Initiative, where residents in Boston's South End worked to block and remove

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hazardous waste, restore public transportation, and create both affordable housing *and* common land trust open spaces. The concluding chapter focuses on ‘middle way’ preservation, where ‘trusts provided the grassroots enthusiasm, the local knowledge of people and resources, and the flexibility necessary to address local circumstances, while state and federal agencies provided funds to mount more ambitious acquisition agendas’ (p. 198). In this way, New England activists and officials coordinated the holdings and work of local trusts, private organisations, state governments, and federal funds to form greenbelts along highways and rivers to create wildlife corridors and recreational green space, or to preserve large tracts of forest land.

Judd concludes with a call for attention to the cooperative framework between community action, the private sector and state resources that produced numerous smaller land trusts. Though national parks may be exemplary of a federal preservationist heritage, the work that created numerous small preserved public spaces as argued for in William Whyte’s *Last Landscape* (1968) was a significant accumulated accomplishment through the twentieth century. This is an argument Judd earns; by the end of the book, he clearly demonstrates that a multitude of ordinary people and local organisations created the mosaic of preserved lands that characterise the New England landscape today. Likewise, the strength of this argument presents opportunities to address whether Judd’s point applies to the notable silences of this book, particularly the centuries of sovereign Indigenous communities’ environmental stewardship that preceded colonial land trusts, or local land preservation in the US beyond New England or national parks. Whether appealing to historians or twenty-first century environmental activists, Judd clearly demonstrates that the histories of local land trusts matter in broader US environmental history and politics.

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