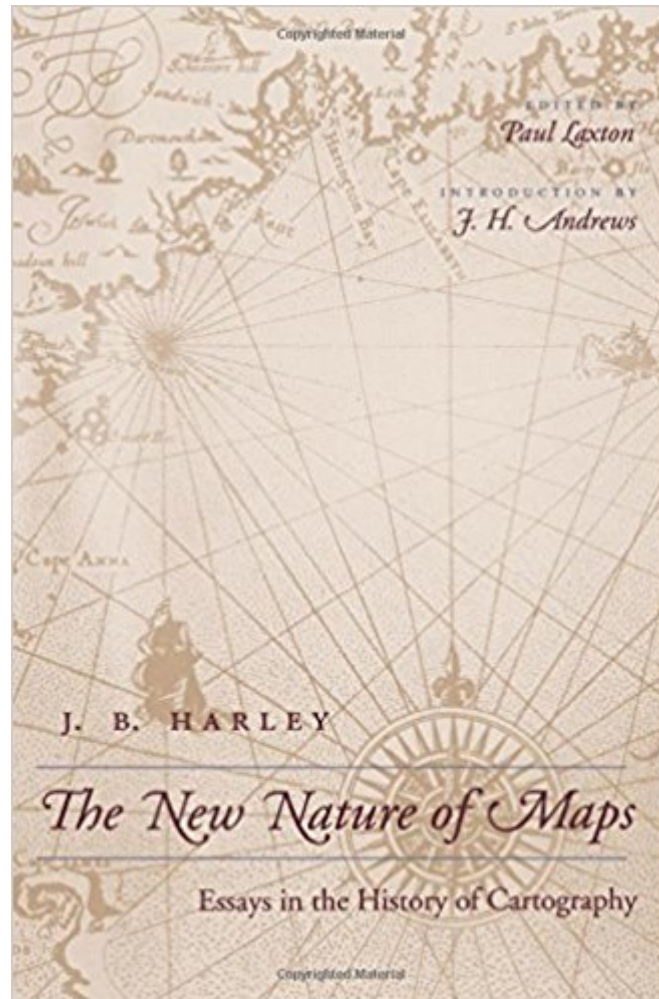


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The New Nature Of Maps: Essays In The History Of Cartography



Synopsis

In this collection of essays J. B. Harley (1932-1991) draws on ideas in art history, literature, philosophy, and the study of visual culture to subvert the traditional, "positivist" model of cartography, replacing it with one that is grounded in an iconological and semiotic theory of the nature of maps. He defines a map as a "social construction" and argues that maps are not simple representations of reality but exert profound influences upon the way space is conceptualized and organized. A central theme is the way in which power—whether military, political, religious, or economic—becomes inscribed on the land through cartography. In this new reading of maps and map making, Harley undertakes a surprising journey into the nature of the social and political unconscious.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I feel compelled to write this review because this book doesn't deserve one star. While it's true that some of Harley's deployment of Foucault (and Barthes) seems a little perfunctory at times-- perhaps Harley is indeed guilty of a little academic trendiness--in total, I found his arguments to be thought-provoking, and unlike the other reviewer, quite readable. The essay on cartographic ethics is still relevant, perhaps now more than ever as we become further and further immersed in a sea of digital maps with almost as little thought on the subject as ever. Ultimately, the take away message from this book for me was one of skeptical readership. Maps, like any other text, should be read and thought about critically and skeptically. In a similar vein, just because one doesn't agree with all the ideas and arguments presented doesn't mean that they can be dismissed outright. Harvey was one

of the most important cartographic historians of the last 50 years, and I think that he should be cut some slack for his willingness to go out on a limb, coming as he does from a field where some still claim that maps are objective, "scientific" representations of reality. Even if Harvey's project doesn't completely work in its entirety, sometimes just asking the questions is a valuable exercise.

Brian Harley can be considered a figurehead in the debate on more human and humane approaches to cartography. This was something very unusual or even daring in the 1980s. The book gathers a selection of some of his most important writings on the history of cartography, the reading between the lines of maps, and the ethics of map making. (Well, I would have included several others, too... a selection always leaves out some stuff.) The articles are dense and packed with theoretical underpinnings that are not everyone's cup of tea, but Harley's merit was to provoke a shift in cartography to a pluralistic idea of mapping and map making - and this is priceless. Some of the pieces in this book look back to more than 20 years of controversies and may not necessarily reflect what is discussed in cartographic theory today, but, nevertheless, this collection is a "classic" for people interested in the "anatomy" and the "making-off" of cartography.

Marxist and post-modernistic verbiage from a cartographic historian who ought to have stuck to his area of expertise. This book is a mish-mash of politically correct essays on the evils of imperialism, racism, eurocentrism, etc. as expressed in maps. Harley was never one to let a trendy leftist ideology go unabsorbed and it shows in these tepid and unreadable essays. A fine example of what's wrong with contemporary academic thought.

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