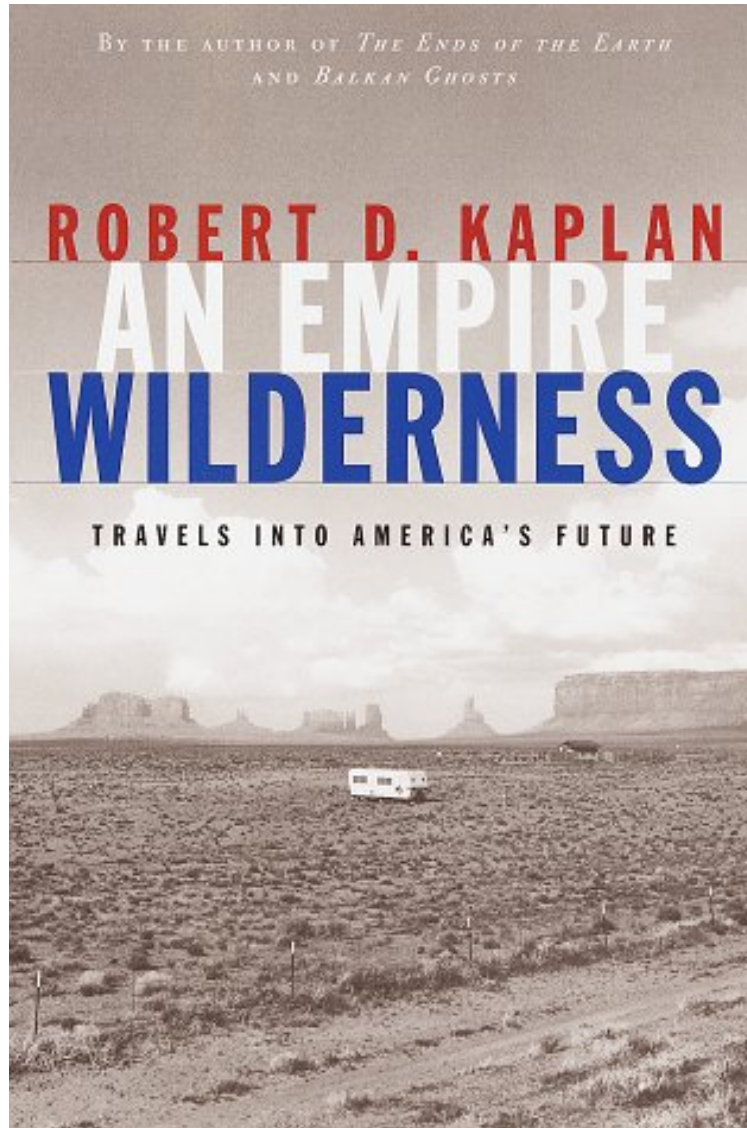


(Read free) An Empire Wilderness : Travels into America's Future

## An Empire Wilderness : Travels into America's Future

*Robert D. Kaplan*

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**Robert D. Kaplan : An Empire Wilderness : Travels into America's Future** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised An Empire Wilderness : Travels into America's Future:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Go West Young Man,Just Read This Before You Go!By Richard Dicaniolt would be interesting to see the changes, if any, good or bad to the sites explored by Kaplan.Published 11 years ago but probably researched more like 12 or 13 this book takes a look, snapshots really, of towns, cities, populations and the economics of selected middle, southern and north-western parts of America.Starting his journey in

all places Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and working his way South to Mexico, across the border and further south into that cesspool, he describes in a pseudo-sociological manner the conditions he discovered. Plenty of interviews with the locals, politicians and other movers and shakers of that particular locale. He tries to and usually gets an honest assessment of what is going on, the local history, past and present and a futuristic glimpse of what they hope to accomplish, mostly to increase the local economy and make better the selected areas for the general population. Some have big ideas and some have realized the futility of their particular situation and are merely trying to maintain the status quo. Then it's on to the more traditional "western states" of New Mexico, Arizona, California and then up as high as Washington state. This offers a good travelling map but based on the obvious changes since then I'm sure conditions have radically differed since publication. Some good writing and insights into the places I've never heard of. For instance, I'm sure you have heard of the Texas Panhandle at some time or another. But have you ever heard of the Oklahoma Panhandle? Me neither. Never even noticed it on the map but exist it does. A true to life no-mans land on the northern part of the state. A vapid strip of dirt, brush and open space, a remnant from some Civil War concession merely 170 miles long and 36 miles wide. Still, people live there in an outback type landscape scratching out an existence after local Indians gave it up because it was so crappy. Many other wild places, places you would never dream people live are uncovered for you in this book. For those whose dreams of retirement to the lands "of enchantment" still bore into your skull on a daily basis as you plod and wade your way through your miserable job you might want to think again. It might not be what you expected today. Then, there is the movement of "reconquista" by Mexico seeking to reclaim all the lands we removed from their possession many years ago without their tacit approval. Trust me, they're doing a good job recovering it and the lower to extreme western part of America might someday be returned to them altering forever the landscape that was once America's or at least White America's. Were we wrong to take it in the first place? well maybe. Should we give it back? The jury is still out on that one. All in all it's a good look at what was. Areas of the country both exciting, prosperous and poor and dismal. This book is useful to those who wish to relocate west. It will give you some insight into the future by allowing you now, to look at its recent past. Only a decade or so, but it will be relevant to gauge if what was planned then by various areas and individuals were able to come to fruition or not. As more and more people look toward the countries interior as a means to escape the coastal turmoil, over crowded conditions, the immigrant influx etc, then this book should be read. Kaplan's style of writing is engaging and did keep my interest well enough and it will enlighten you, of this I'm sure. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A stranger in his own (changing) country? By Peter Monks Much like his well-known earlier work *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*, here Kaplan (between twelve and fifteen years ago) explores the US west of the Mississippi and based on a mix of formal interviews and casual encounters with both picaresque locals and ivory-tower bound theorists presents an original and largely optimistic view of North America's future. His vision of a radical and largely positive change that includes a greater blurring of racial/ethnic identity and weakening of traditional governance structures and borders (albeit with some real pockets of urban disadvantage with almost insoluble problems) has obviously influenced some of Kaplan's later work such as *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate*. Strengths of "An Empire Wilderness" include Kaplan's willingness to venture off the beaten track and think for himself in a part of the world as seemingly unfamiliar to the East-coast based Kaplan as the Former Yugoslavia was some of the other remote subjects of his writing, while it must be acknowledged that at times he has been a bit too impressed with first (or colourful) impressions and has not necessarily been as critical or discriminating as he could have been in determining the difference between the merely arresting and that which is really important or enduring. Even where the reader can be unconvinced of Kaplan's conclusions, his willingness to be sceptical of certain enduring US national myths and point out the failings of both big government and laissez-faire urban policies suggest that Kaplan - if an occasionally overly-impressionable observer - is willing to do his own thinking and is not a doctrinaire 'neo-con' with ulterior motives as occasionally alleged by negative reviewers. Certainly worth a (critical) read if you are interested in a well-written travelogue with a policy perspective. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great Book By Polarbear I've been reading Kaplan for years. He has a unique way of exploring an issue or region of the world and bringing it home for the reader in a way that balances history, politics, and culture with a touch of the exotic. Kaplan also has a keen grasp of the world and where it is going. Reading Kaplan is always interesting, provocative, and thought-provoking. I would recommend any book he's written as a good read. Kaplan brings a unique ability to not only explain the past and the present, but to imagine the future, as well. His writings are studied by Army officers trying to decipher where the future will take us and how they might best prepare for the unexpected. I've enjoyed reading his descriptions of Ethiopia, Afghanistan, West Africa, Yugoslavia, and his travels with the US military around the world, but this book is different because he is trying to explain the US and see us with new eyes. That's not so easy to do. I think you could spend the rest of your life traveling the US and interviewing people and still be no closer to the truth than when you started. The central premise of the book asks will Americans hearing John Philip Sousa marches in 50 years still feel the same patriotic pride they do now. Reading this book, I'm not so sure they will. Kaplan does a masterful job of trying to explain the past and the present, as well as the trends and challenges that may change the America we know into something very different in the future.

Having reported on some of the world's most violent, least understood regions in his bestsellers *Balkan Ghosts* and *The Ends of the Earth*, Robert Kaplan now returns to his native land, the United States of America. Traveling, like Tocqueville and John Gunther before him, through a political and cultural landscape in transition, Kaplan reveals a nation shedding a familiar identity as it assumes a radically new one. An Empire Wilderness opens in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where the first white settlers moved into Indian country and where Manifest Destiny was born. In a world whose future conflicts can barely be imagined, it is also the place where the army trains its men to fight the next war. "A nostalgic view of the United States is deliberately cultivated here," Kaplan writes, "as if to bind the uncertain future to a reliable past." From Fort Leavenworth, Kaplan travels west to the great cities of the heartland--to St. Louis, once a glorious shipping center expected to outshine imperial Rome and now touted, with its desolate inner city and miles of suburban gated communities, as "the most average American city." Kaplan continues west to Omaha; down through California; north from Mexico, across Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas; up to Montana and Canada, and back through Oregon. He visits Mexican border settlements and dust-blown county sheriffs' offices, Indian reservations and nuclear bomb plants, cattle ranches in the Oklahoma Panhandle, glacier-mantled forests in the Pacific Northwest, swanky postsuburban sprawls and grim bus terminals, and comes, at last, to the great battlefield at Vicksburg, Mississippi, where an earlier generation of Americans gave their lives for their vision of an American future. But what, if anything, he asks, will today's Americans fight and die for? At Vicksburg Kaplan contemplates the new America through which he has just traveled--an America of sharply polarized communities that draws its population from pools of talent far beyond its borders; an America where the distance between winners and losers grows exponentially as corporations assume gov-ernment functions and the wealthy find themselves more closely linked to their business associates in India and China than to their poorer neighbors a few miles away; an America where old loyalties and allegiances are vanishing and new ones are only beginning to emerge. The new America he found is in the pages of this book. Kaplan gives a precise and chilling vision of how the most successful nation the world has ever known is entering the final, and highly uncertain, phase of its history.

.com Robert Kaplan has reported from locales as diverse and chaotic as shantytowns in the Ivory Coast, death camps in Cambodia, and the frontlines of the war-ravaged Balkans, but his most challenging assignment may have been covering his own country. In this ambitious and evocative study, Kaplan vividly chronicles his "travels into America's future," a journey that begins in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas--"the starting point for what would one day be called Manifest Destiny"--and continues across the West, where the population is growing faster than anywhere else in the country and multiple American identities reveal a nation in flux. He explores cities such as St. Louis and Omaha, Nebraska, that typify the increased urban fragmentation of the heartland; onward to Tucson, Arizona, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, where great wealth and poverty exist cheek by jowl; through the sprawl of multiethnic Southern California, where the landscape is perched somewhere between urban and suburban; and up through the Pacific Northwest into Canada. He also visits towns along the U.S.-Mexico border, dipping as far south as Mexico City, to investigate the conditions driving so many Mexicans north, despite feverish efforts by the U.S. to keep them out, and the new cultural hybrid being formed by this migration. Kaplan uncovers a nation polarized along ethnic, economic, and political lines, where the uneven distribution of rapid technological advances allows some groups to surge forward, cultivating a radically different world-view than their poorer, less educated neighbors. Much of his report is bleak, but despite his insistence on documenting the worst, plenty of examples of prosperity and hope appear in these pages. What comes across most clearly is that there is still plenty of room for speculation on exactly how and where the new boundaries will be drawn. In this respect, America's future still carries the promise of the Wild West: equal parts opportunity, possibility, and uncertainty. --Shawn Carkonen  
From Publishers Weekly  
Having spent more than two decades reporting on ethnic strife and political upheaval in far-flung regions of the world, Kaplan (*Balkan Ghosts*), turns to his own backyard, trekking across the American West, Mexico and western Canada to map out America's shifting socio-political landscape at the turn of the millennium. The nation, he argues, is losing its identity as one union and splintering, like the Balkanized areas of the globe that have long captivated Kaplan, into a mosaic of different regions with sometimes conflicting cultural identities. In crossing the American Plains and Rocky Mountains, Kaplan sees the growth of city-states and the growing income gap as leading to class-stratified, post-urban pods, in which government does little to improve the living conditions of the poor. The rising Hispanic population in the Southwest has fostered "binational" cities, he says, while the shared interests of America's Pacific Northwest and British Columbia is creating Cascadia, a self-contained region predicated on the eventual breakup of Canada. Kaplan's fluid, razor-sharp travelogue is peppered with references to Gibbon, the Founding Fathers, ancient Greek and Civil War history and powerful descriptions of the landscape (a Greyhound bus in New Mexico is "a prison van transporting people from one urban poverty zone to another"; the Arizona desert resembles "the glazed surface of a red earthen jar"; the Pacific Northwest "a magical frontier" of "brooding cathedral-dark forests" and place-names suggesting "an icy clean, mathematical perfection"). As dystopian as it is soberly prescient, Kaplan's vision of 21st-century America will command the attention of readers from all corners of our increasingly decentralized continent. Editor, Jason Epstein; agent, Brandt Brandt. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library

Journal "The continued existence of the U.S. should never be taken for granted.... But this book is not about the decline of the U.S.; it is about its transformation." Beginning in Fort Leavenworth, KS, Kaplan (*The Ends of the Earth*, LJ 1/96) travels west through the American heartland and then south and north along the Pacific coast. He summarizes the history of the cities and regions he visits, observes their distinct cultures, and presents an impressionistic vision of the American future. Kaplan covers a vast range of territory?immigration, Native American influences, the environment, racial antagonism and cooperation, the impact of telecommunications, and the tensions between individualism and government. His narrative meanders in and out of the communities he visits and the historical eras he describes, and he intersperses his text with the voices of the people he meets along the way. Less about America's future than its past and present, Kaplan's travelog informs despite his highly speculative and inconclusive view of a future strongly influenced by American political and economic models but no longer dominated by her power.-?Jack Forman, Mesa Coll. Lib., San DiegoCopyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.