



Brave New West: Morphing Moab at the Speed of Greed

Jim Stiles

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When Jim Stiles moved west from Kentucky in the 1970s to make Moab, Utah, his home, that corner of the rural West had already endured decades of obscurity, a uranium boom and then a bust, and was facing an identity crisis. What kind of economy would prevent Moab from becoming yet another ghost town? For more than two decades, environmentalists in southeast Utah have had a simple answer to this question: replace extractive industries—mining, timber, and cattle—with an economy catering to "green" tourists with hotels, restaurants, and bars. They feel that if these lands can be spared further degradation by huge industries, the West could begin to thrive on something cleaner and more lucrative. But Stiles sees a downside to this seemingly idyllic vision. Bringing insight based on decades of residence in Moab, he makes a provocative and compelling argument that the economy most environmentalists hail as the solution to the woes of the rural West is in fact creating an unprecedented impact of its own. In recent years, Moab and other rural towns across the West have seen a massive influx of urbanites fleeing crowded cities in search of a simpler life. Yet Stiles also observes that these transplants are often unwilling to accept the isolation and lack of services that characterize genuine rural life. Believing themselves to be liberal, sensitive, enlightened environmentalists, they nevertheless bring with them exactly the type of lifestyle and ecological impact that they sought to leave behind and, in the process, create a community that no longer serves the native inhabitants. With a blend of travelogue, local color, and geography, Stiles engages readers with folksy humor while defending the lifestyle.

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