DISPATCHES FROM DYSTOPIA

Histories of Places Not Yet Forgotten

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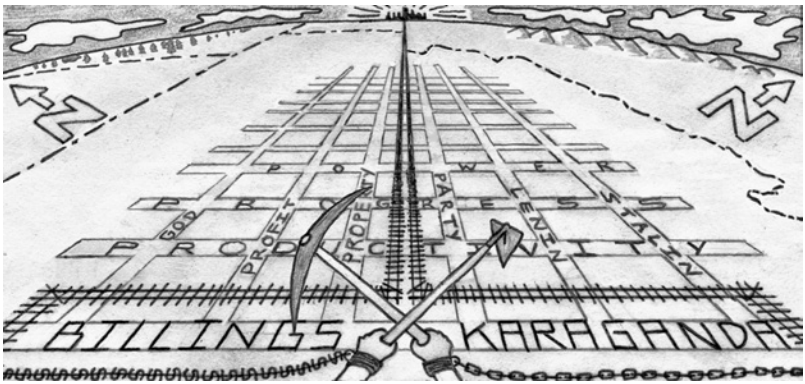


From the map of Karaganda, it appears that its city plan was based on the model of the old Roman military camp—set up along a grid, the old Stalin Prospect running north to south, the former Lenin Prospect bisecting it east to west. The grid makes sense for a prison city. It creates wide-open spaces and straight lines, an architecture designed not to be seen but to facilitate seeing, to support surveillance of the city's inhabitants so as to regulate and contain their conduct. Karaganda, located on the arid steppe of northern Kazakhstan, was founded in the early 1930s alongside KarLag, one of the largest labor camps in the Soviet Union. Karaganda was a prison city in that it was built largely by convicts and fed on crops grown in the labor camp's farms, while prisoners and deportees worked in the mines and factories of its blossoming industries.[1] In 1930, Karaganda was not even a point on the map. By 1939, the city had 100,000 inhabitants, half of them wards

(prisoners or deportees) of the Ministry of Interior's Gulag division (NKVD-Gulag).[2]

I had expected Karaganda to have that smoke-belching, wrecked look of the industrial cities of Soviet Russia to the north. But I was surprised. After Joseph Stalin died in 1953, the prisoners were gradually given amnesty, the barracks dismantled, the barbed wire lifted, and, curiously, what remains is a neatly ordered city of broad avenues and shady sidewalks, monumental squares and symmetrically plotted parks, ample and verdant. There is plenty of parking, convenient shopping, and no cramped corners. No sign of the gulag's secrecy or human suffering is written into the urban landscape. Instead, Karaganda is an open-armed embrace that says it has nothing to hide. There are no old shops to dig out of back alleys, no tenements or crowded nineteenth-century courtyards of the kind Dostoyevsky haunted. In fact, Karaganda is so well-ordered, there is no great need to explore it on foot. It can be read easily from the upholstered comfort of a car at cruising speed.

The car slides by long columns of housing blocks, which replaced the prisoners' barracks in the 1950s. The residential tracts, built with assembly-line efficiency, are the Soviet equivalent of the American suburban development. The same three blueprints echo in row after row, the same efficient economy of occupancy and technology behind the lace curtains, the same segregation of space based on the daily repetition of meals, commuting, and recreation around which American homes are also designed. Built rapidly, rapidly looking obsolete, the buildings radiate that temporal quality of much of American architecture, as if designed not for generations of a family but for cycles of a professional career, a familiar architecture responding to the unmatched social mobility of the twentieth century.[3]

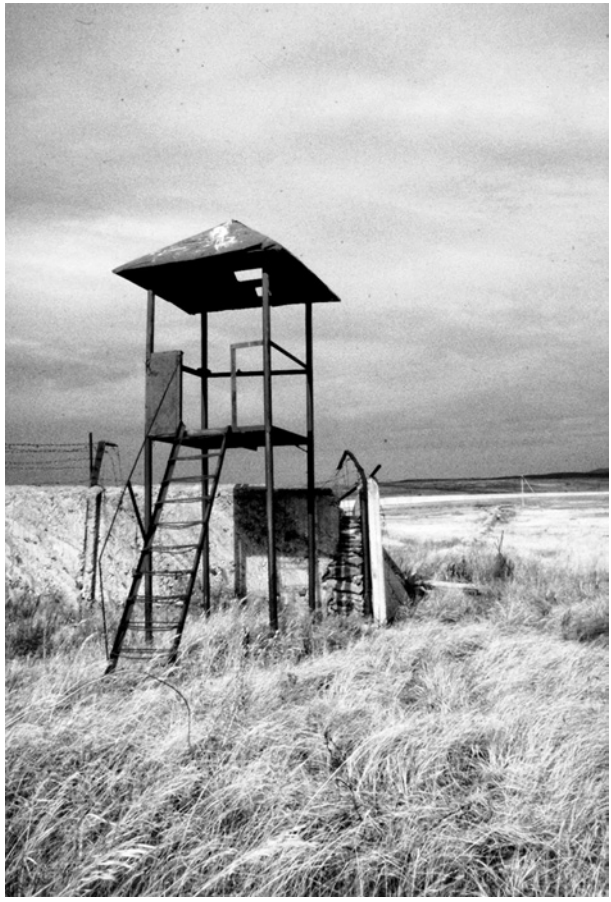
One evening, I stood on the balcony of my Karaganda hotel room, looking at neon signs glistening along the rain-soaked streets. The October wind breathed the first frost of winter and sent skyward small wrappers of candy imported from North America. In the distance, the comforting lights of thousands of living rooms lit up the expanse, revealing the soothing grid as it marched up and down, partitioning the electrified urban spaces from the black void of the steppe beyond. Here, far from home, in the midst of a former gulag on the Kazakh steppe, I had the uncanny feeling that I had seen this city be-

fore. Karaganda, with its gridded composure, easy repetition of residential units, carefully swept walks and after-school dance classes, seemed oddly familiar, as if I had landed not in Central Asia but in the American middle west, in Wichita, Topeka, Bismarck, or Billings.

Billings, Montana. Like most railroad cities, Billings can be navigated without a map. Broad arteries cut north and south, avenues east and west. The streets are platted out and conveniently numbered, beginning at one and continuing, hypothetically, to infinity, in keeping with the grand aspirations of the founding fathers. The Yellowstone River flows unnoted on the outskirts of town, beyond the grain elevators, railroad switching yards, and oil refineries. Looking at Billings from the height of the cliffs above it, the mind drifts off to high-school geometry, trying to take in the ever-divisible asphalt grid of smaller and smaller blocks that break down to rectangular spaces etched with yellow paint on the parking lots. Fly over Billings, and this chessboard divisibility of space expands to cover the whole land: squared-off fields contained within square-mile sections fit into angular counties in the washboard abdomen of the country, where the states break up into rectangles and trapezoids.

Standing on the bluff overlooking Billings, I was better able to decipher what it was that made it feel like Karaganda: the divisibility and hierarchy of space, the abrupt, fortresslike partition of urban from agricultural territory, the lonely feeling of a city adrift like a ship on a sea of land that is inhospitable and unpredictable. Yet, historically, these similarities didn't make sense. Karaganda is a city erected in the midst of a vast labor camp, a city where in the 1990s children planting trees in the schoolyard would come across human bones. Billings, by contrast, was founded by railroad entrepreneurs, farmers, miners, and businessmen on the American frontier. One city is the product of an authoritarian state that employed and ruled everyone who toiled there; the other, a conglomerate of competing business interests and individual farmers. Two countries, worlds apart, two different histories, yet cities in the American West share the same modern, expansive, modular feel as Karaganda because Karaganda, like every western American railroad city, is built along a grid.

The fact of the grid may seem like no fact at all. For the grid is no novelty; it has been used as an architectural model for centuries, and



KarLag guard tower. Photo by author.

it does not necessarily follow that all gridded cities are born of the same motivations. Kazakhstan and the Great Plains fall in the same topographical zone of vast, arid, high plateaus. One could argue that the flat, endless landscapes lend themselves easily to geometric dissection.[4] Yet it seems logical that two such contrasting societies—the communist Soviet Union and democratic United States—would naturally develop cities in distinct patterns expressing the vast differences between the two countries in ideas, politics, and economic structure. For if one believes that form relates to content—that cities contain their histories, as Italo Calvino writes, "like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets and the gratings of the windows"—then

can it be purely coincidental that Karaganda, a prison city, and Billings, a railroad town, look alike?[5]

To attempt any kind of analogy between Karaganda and Billings is to ignore the polarities between the two places. For at least in terms of imagery, one can conceive of few regions more dissimilar. The American West represents the last, inexhaustible frontier of American individualism, the place where people went to be free. Northern Kazakhstan, conversely, conjures an image similar to that of Siberia; it is a place of unfreedom, exile, and imprisonment, a place where masses of undifferentiated people were sent against their will to serve a monolithic state. Placed in the larger context of the United States and the Soviet Union, the contrasts between the two cities intensify: the free market versus the planned economy, the democracy of the people versus the dictatorship of the proletariat, the pioneer versus the exile, the self-made man and free labor versus the machinated relationship of prison guard and convict. To liken Billings to Karaganda is to blur the domains, as we have defined them, of freedom and bondage, liberty and oppression. People were deported to Karaganda against their will. They were either sentenced to hard labor in camps or exiled to special settlements, and they starved, froze, and worked until they dropped from exhaustion. Of course, it is true that on the Great Plains people also starved, froze, and worked until they dropped from exhaustion, but in the American Plains they did it of their own free will; they bought their own train tickets. Is that difference of free will essential?

Just by posing the question, I threaten to relativize the oppression of the Soviet penal system and the suffering of millions of people sent into exile or to the gulag. Certainly, there is a difference between Billings and Karaganda, a difference calculable in both magnitude and outcome. As Soviet archives have been opened, documentary evidence has confirmed survivor accounts that narrate how Soviet security forces—the OGPU, NKVD, and MVD[6]—uprooted millions of peaceful citizens and subjected them to physical and psychological abuse, starvation, and conditions ripe for disease, from which hundreds of thousands of people died.[7] The years of arrest and deportation tore apart families, destroyed communities, and changed permanently both social relations and the landscape.

Yet setting aside for a moment the well-documented differences be-

tween the penal Kazakh steppe and free-market American frontier, I wonder if there is significance to the spatial similarities of the grid in Montana and Kazakhstan.

Maybe. Comparisons can be fruitful. They can also be misleading or overtly political.[8] Anything can be compared to anything. It is a trick of historians to juxtapose historic eras or regimes to point out similarities or differences and thus win an argument. Since the onset of the Cold War, for example, Stalin's Soviet Union has often been likened to Hitler's Nazi regime. The extremes of left and right are seen to fuse at one common point of total communist/fascist social control, illustrating the apex of state terror.[9] Contrasts, too, can be used for polemical effect. In the same Cold War years, historians, journalists, and politicians in the United States have focused on Soviet transgressions such as the purge trials, collectivization, and the suppression of dissidents as a way to spell out what democratic America is not or should never become.[10] Conversely, Soviet historians and journalists for decades fixated on American ghettos, racial strife, social unrest, and rising crime rates as a sign that Soviet socialism was on the right track.[11]

Now, with the threat of the Cold War faded, there is more room to question whether knowledge itself has not been gridded into neat polarities, communist and democratic. Histories tend to prioritize texts, written matter, and ideological categorizations. And certainly, in the heated debates of the Cold War, words, rhetoric, and ideologies were highly evaluated, perhaps overvalued, at the cost of ignoring and diminishing the history of the production of spaces and the lives that have been forged by and for those spaces. This is no new idea. Several decades ago, Henri Lefebvre asserted that there is no communism, just two myths: "that of anti-communism, on the one hand, and the myth that communism had been carried out somewhere on the other." Lefebvre doubted the existence of communism because it had led to no architectural innovation, no creation of specifically socialist spaces.[12] In other words, in the history of space, communism and capitalism have produced no qualities that distinguish one from the other.

What would happen, then, if I discarded all that is commonly known about the polarities of communism and capitalism and, just for the sake of argument, explored the spatial affinities? With this approach, it may turn out that historians and politicians in both countries have focused to the point of obfuscation on the differences between Soviet

communism and American capitalism and ignored the parallels produced by the industrial-capital expansions of the twentieth century.[13] After all, a mirror image, as the Soviet Union has been purported to be to the United States, is just the same form reflected backward. We may even recognize in the two countries similar paths of development and destruction that differ more in scale than form. If that is so, then the decades of fixing on political systems and ideology appear in retrospect as a prolonged exercise in self-definition. Neither country could have existed without the other, because each country used its communist/capitalist nemesis as a self-justifying point of departure; each country projected a mirror image of the other in order to define and produce itself so as to rule. Without the specter of the counter-revolutionary capitalist or the subversive communist, each country would have had a much harder time defining the abnormal and the dangerous; thus, it would have been more difficult to appropriate the power to condemn and exclude, to coax and coerce into conformity.[14] In short, if we strain away the mountains of verbiage encircling the Cold War, it might appear that the Soviet Union and the United States share a great deal in common.

Or perhaps we are still too close to the twentieth century to see how greater forces have, over the last hundred years, put disparate lives in sync in strange ways. To do so requires a different set of questions than those the Cold War theoreticians posed. Rather than asking where is freedom and where is bondage, who has choices and who does not, who wields power and who is powerless, I might question, more simply, *how* is power produced?[15] And once that question flutters down to eye level, the gaze is drawn to spaces that once seemed innocent of manipulation—urban architecture, transportation routes, lines of communication, patterns of production—all of which represent a particular political and economic logic that has inhabited our societies, both Soviet and American, for the bulk of the century—inhabited them with an encompassing opacity.[16]

My question, then, is—is it possible to write the history of gridded spaces? If so, do the gridded spaces of Kazakhstan and Montana constitute the endpoint of larger processes that the United States and Soviet Union shared? Lefebvre sees the grid as an abstraction, "a superstructure foreign to the original space," that serves as a foothold to establish the basis of rule.[17] James C. Scott understands the grid as a

way to simplify the opaque and complex quality of indigenous social practices so as to enhance centralized power at the cost of local rule.[18] In short, the grid can serve as an apparatus for conquest, as a way to dominate space. Narrated together, the histories of Karaganda in Kazakhstan and Billings and Butte in Montana illustrate how the grid evolved just as the territories were being swept into the larger industrial and agricultural economies of their respective expanding states in eras of superlative industrial and bureaucratic expansion. During North America's second industrial revolution, which preceded World War I, the railroad, America's first national bureaucracy, put Billings, Butte, and other cities in Montana on the map. In northern Kazakhstan, the Communist Party, and specifically the NKVD, charted out Karaganda and many Soviet cities during the industrialization drive of the 1930s, which foreshadowed World War II, at a time when the Soviet state first became an industrialized and bureaucratized power. In both places, political forces produced gridded space, often violently, to serve economic and political goals.

But that is getting ahead of the story. To start from the beginning—there were no cities in northern Kazakhstan or the Great Plains before the steam engine and railroad. The populations of preindustrial cities in Central Asia and the American plains were largely supported by surrounding agricultural communities, and grew only so large as the limits of the land, the reach of walled fortifications, and scarce supplies of food, water, and cultivable soil allowed. Without technology, the short grasslands of the steppe and range, the dry, continental climates, could support no more than small communities of sedentary peoples tilling the soil, and were best suited for nomads living off the migratory grazing of range animals adapted to the extreme cold, heat, and aridity of the climate.

All of this changed in the industrial age. Cities no longer needed to follow the lay of the land or to rely on locally produced foodstuffs to feed their populations. Montana and Kazakhstan could support urban populations by means of technologies such as railroad networks, steam engines, irrigation systems, and the telegraph and telephone, all of which required a concentration of capital investment so large that in both regions it fell to a small group of managers to direct from afar the means of production and labor that kept everything going.

The managers in both places oversaw these vast networks with the help of time schedules, statistics, and production plans, and with the regimentation and subjection of labor.[19] In both Montana and Karaganda, the rush for land, water, minerals, and cash crops displaced indigenous peoples who had formerly inhabited the territories, while the European populations that replaced them were sorted according to contrived understandings of race, class, and loyalty.

These patterns of production created corresponding patterns of subjection, which determined that people settled the American high plains and Central Asian steppe in similar ways by carving land into economic units for efficient exploitation. New towns, located for the benefit of commerce and the quick extraction of resources at railheads, responded not to ecological limits but to the surveyor's rational grid.[20] The grid made space modular and repetitious. The urban grid was a concentration of the expanding rural grid, which linked the hinterland economically and spatially with cities. As a consequence, there were no topographical limits to urban space, and the cities grew and multiplied, supplanting the nomadic cultures that came before. In fact, the cities born during this century gave new meaning to nomadism by ambling across the flat plains wherever transportation routes wandered, with nothing to stop them but sheer loneliness.

In both countries, as a result, conquest meant consumption; the newcomers ingested—in coal, copper, wheat, sugar beets, ore—the territories they desired. In short, the histories of cities in Montana and Kazakhstan complement one another. Taken in tandem, they tell not two stories but one—the history of gridded space.

The sun reaches low for the horizon, the exhaust rises up from the valley, and gazing down on Billings the mind wanders to childhood stories about the frontier—tales of "hardy pioneers," "bringing civilization," "displacing savagery." These brave and arrogant aphorisms lay on the hardened sand before me like the rusted carcasses of the tin cans that followed European settlers wherever they traveled. American historians have discarded most of the myths of winning the West, and indeed it is hard to see that legend in the small corporate city of Billings.[21] In fact, Billings seems to have no history at all written into its carefully measured right angles. Or rather, its history might be sought in the wake of the bulldozer and the moving van—in the va-

cated lots and disowned possessions of the long row of thrift stores—which makes sense, because Billings was not founded on precedent or history. Its story, instead, like that of many western cities, is located in a vaporously elusive understanding of the future. As an early settler of Kansas instructed his readers: "The American of today must find his enjoyment in anticipating the future. He must look beyond the unsightly beginnings of civilization and prefigure the state of things a century hence."[22] The trick in the Great Plains involved overlooking the present to gaze at the future, but a future that never arrived, whether it be in steers, coal, or grain.

This myopia for the present tense helped give Billings its start. In 1881 the land on which Billings stands today was considered worthless. It was a barren, waterless alkali flat with here and there an oasis of sagebrush. The settlers and traders who first came to the region settled upstream at Clark's Fork Bottom, where the confluence of two rivers made a good trading post and where the land was fertile and water more plentiful. The residents of Clark's Fork assumed that when the railroad came through it would logically create a terminal in their little settlement, where there were a few traders and farmers already waiting for trains to bring in goods and ship their produce to market. But railroad executives in St. Paul and New York had a different set of priorities. The federal government had deeded the Northern Pacific line alternating townships of forty square miles on either side of the tracks to help offset the cost of building a transcontinental railroad. Frederick Billings, the president of the Northern Pacific, and his engineers studied the U.S. survey maps and determined that, at a certain point, the odd-numbered townships lay next to each other across the line of the railroad, instead of connecting at the corners as they did elsewhere.[23] Sensibly, Mr. Billings decided to locate the new city at that point where the railroad owned twice as much land as usual.

Then Frederick Billings did something even more sensible. He and a few associates formed a real estate development company and bought from the railroad 29,394 acres in the city-to-be for less than four dollars an acre. It made no difference to Mr. Billings that the site for the new city planned for twenty thousand residents would be established on barren flats, somewhat removed from the swampy edges of the river, without drinking water, two miles north of the closest human habitation. Within the four walls of real estate speculation, the siting

of Billings made sense; the fact that the site was barely habitable mattered little to Mr. Billings. After all, Frederick Billings never dreamed of living in Billings.

After the Minnesota and Montana Land and Improvement Company chose the site for Billings, the company designed the city plan, with the railroad at its center, allocated building lots, and proposed future industrial development before any actual building took place, before the "city" was anything but a thicket of squatters' tents.[24] Nonetheless, the founding of the new city was trumpeted for hundreds of miles, and the profits to be made were fabulous. Once it was announced that Billings was going to be the next "Magic City," Frederick Billings's land development company began selling off the alkali flats at $250 for a quarter-acre lot. Whole blocks were sold in New York and Chicago, and within a few months the price had risen to $1,200.[25] By the summer of 1882, most of the city property was purchased, yet two-thirds of the owners were absentee; people who bought lots never planned to live in the hot, dry, treeless flats but to resell them later at a profit.[26]

The cosmology that ordained the grid in Billings pivoted around economics and administration. Billings's real estate company subdivided land into parcels, uniform and commercially interchangeable, because it made for efficient marketing and sales, especially from remote offices in St. Paul and Chicago. In this way, engineers, land agents, and railroad executives established, planned, and promoted towns identical to Billings throughout the West—Laramie, Reno, Bismarck, Cheyenne. The pioneering homesteader, the cowboy, and the lonesome miner are essential figures in American mythology and self-identity, but historians of the American West have argued that the vanguard of settlement in the West were these corporate-owned towns, run by businessmen who operated on the profits from real estate speculation fueled by federal land grants and the promise of future growth and industrial development.[27]

Karaganda, like Billings, was an unmarked void on the map before its founding as a city in 1930. It consisted of a ramble of shacks, a few abandoned buildings from a tsarist-era coal mine, and a small and occasional market where Kazakhs would come to trade sheep pelts and mutton steaks for salt, flour, and other necessities. In the late 1920s, Soviet geologists rediscovered the Karaganda coal basin, after which the Moscow-based Department of Mines set up the Karaganda

Coal Trust and determined that the site would be home to a major new industrial city. Without visiting the region, architects in Moscow drew up plans for a city of forty thousand workers who would dig out a projected twelve new mines. Within the year, several thousand miners, most of them Kazakhs, began working underground in Karaganda. But the Coal Trust found that it could not keep its stores stocked with enough food to feed the miners, and despite a city plan calling for seven square meters of sanitary housing per person, housing conditions stumbled into proletarian disgrace, with most of the miners living in yurts or tents scattered near the mine shafts. In search of food, the Kazakh miners drifted to and from their native *auls* (villages), which made for a sporadic and ill-disciplined labor force, and coal production sagged below prerevolutionary figures.[28]

In February 1931, however, the railroad arrived in Karaganda and with it a whole new form of discipline. The railroad brought supplies, geologists, and experienced miners from the Donbass in Ukraine, and it also brought NKVD officers, who quickly realized the limitless possibilities of establishing a labor camp next to the Karaganda mines. Sounding as optimistic as a Billings railroad associate, an NKVD officer wrote that the combination of virgin land, mineral resources, and a rail connection meant that "Kazakhstan offers remarkable potential for the creation of a powerful agricultural base. Only a labor reserve is needed due to the sparsely populated territory."[29] A labor camp, NKVD officials proposed, would funnel a plentiful supply of workers to Karaganda to till the virgin soil and produce food for the miners. In 1931 the Gulag division of the NKVD set up KarLag on 281,000 acres of land around the growing settlement of Karaganda and began to import labor.[30]

The labor camp helped solved Karaganda's shortage of workers and food. City leaders made use of prison labor to grow crops on the outskirts of the city and to work on construction sites in the city to build housing for the miners. To supervise the prisoner-laborers, NKVD guards walled districts into "zones" separated with barbed wire, each about the size of a city block. The guards required avenues straight and broad enough to march prisoners in columns to work sites and enough visibility to shoot in case anyone made a run for it. It is tempting to postulate that Karaganda's grid grew out of the demands of prison architecture, except for the fact that most modern Soviet cities

are likewise platted in a grid. Soviet planners in the 1930s designed and created many other industrial cities—ones not intended for prisoners—that are nearly interchangeable with Karaganda.[31]

In the early 1930s, Soviet planners dreamed of building an entirely new kind of "socialist city" that would express the principles of socialism in every line of every building. A socialist city, they postulated, would demonstrate the antithesis of the confusion and grime of a capitalist city. Soviet architects dreamed of "modernization without urbanism" and preferred to build cities from the ground up, on virgin soil.[32] They sought to design rational landscapes in which people would live safely and equitably, with plenty of light, space, and visibility. Architects from as far away as Germany submitted blueprints for cities that did not look like cities at all, but more like parks, spaceships, or modern art. Once built, however, the new socialist cities all looked alike, heedless of climate and topography; they were plotted symmetrically along a grid, Lenin Prospect running east-west, Stalin Prospect north-south. What motivated the grid in the Soviet context?

Even though private property was outlawed in Soviet socialism, concepts of ownership and management determined the shape of Karaganda, much as they did Billings. Individuals in the Soviet Union could not own land, but after the Soviet government nationalized all property, it allocated territory in vast swaths to state enterprises. The NKVD became a major recipient of land in northern Kazakhstan and one of the major exploiters of natural resources. By 1936 the NKVD controlled 795,600 acres of what had previously been Kazakh pastureland. By 1941 it was responsible for 12 percent of all Soviet lumber, 54 percent of all nickel, 75 percent of all molybdenum, and 37 percent of all tungsten production. The total value of gulag industrial production between 1941 and 1944 reached 3.6 billion rubles.[33] Land that to Kazakh nomads had been a flowing body of winter and summer pastures marked with ancestral burial grounds became to the Europeans who conquered it a series of parcels, surveyed in square meters and assigned value in rubles.[34]

To effect the transformation from ancestral land to commodified space, European settlers first envisioned indigenous land as empty, waiting to be populated. Billings and Karaganda were conceived in the minds of people who first saw the territories as representations on

a map. The land for both cities was granted by federal governments to growing bureaucracies charged with settling the territories for the production of raw materials. In both cases, cities were platted by planners in remote locations who, drawing a series of lines on paper, finalized century-long processes of transferring territory from indigenous to European hands. The first blueprints for Billings posited a city for twenty thousand residents; Karaganda, fifty years later, was to have forty thousand. Once the transactions were complete, the cities came into being, contemporaries in Billings noted, like "magic": "the thoroughfares of Billings present a scene of business activity such as is not witnessed in any other town of Montana. The change seems almost as wonderful as some of those related in the old time tales of Eastern magic."[35] In Karaganda, historians also marveled at how the city sprang to life: "Great changes have taken place under Soviet rule on the Kazakh steppe. Where there used to be a few felt yurts and adobe huts, now a beautiful city has arisen . . . We see wide, tree-lined streets, avenues, parks and squares."[36]

One can read into this narrative on progress the classic subtext of the Soviet command economy at work: the city, planned from afar—but far from planned in actuality, significantly funded by the central coffers of the ominously expanding Soviet bureaucracy whose task it was to industrialize at all cost—but primarily built by cheap or unpaid manual labor. The years of hard work and spent lives that went into making Karaganda are summed up in a brief origin story describing one seemingly effortless leap from empty steppe to modern city.

Both Soviet and American proselytizers emphasize origins. What had been empty was filled in, the barren made green, the primitive sophisticated. Europeans arrived, found places empty of history, and gave them a beginning, and thus meaning. And they did it, the writers stress, quickly. In these new places, in the dawning age of fossil-fuel technology, civilization did not need centuries to ripen, as it had in Europe. There was no time for that. The promoters of Soviet and American insta-cities were drunk on speed, efficiency, the "magic" of machines.[37] They threw up hospitals, schools, courthouses, and libraries so that each new city would look like "a city," built not in decades, years, or even months, but weeks. Labor crews in Karaganda competed with builders in Leningrad in a construction race and won.[38] In the American West, the English scholar James Bryce wrote

critically of the pace of expansion: "Why sacrifice the present to the future? Why seek to complete in a few decades what the other nations of the world took thousands of years over in the older continents? Why do things rudely and ill which need to be done well, seeing that the welfare of your descendants may turn upon them? . . . the unrestfulness, the passion for speculation, the feverish eagerness for quick and showy results, may so soak into the texture of the popular mind as to color it for centuries to come."[39]

Leaders in both countries set out to colonize vast new territories immediately, conquering by consuming land, crops, and minerals in assembly-line fashion. The problem was, although Soviet and American planners could imagine these insta-cities, they could not orchestrate enough bricks, laborers, and lumber to build them. In this sense, the American booster press and Soviet propaganda read like science fiction. The words describe a possible, even plausible, future, but one that did not yet exist.

T. C. Armitage discovered this fictional quality of the new urban spaces the hard way. He was an insurance man who worked in the Northern Pacific engineering office in St. Paul. He worked for the railroad and should have known better than to believe the booster press campaigns coming from Billings. Armitage put cash down on a few lots, sight unseen, choosing a prime location by the Yellowstone River. Soon after, he boarded the Northern Pacific to Billings. When he arrived, he was dismayed to find no depot, no real city, no town, not even an outpost, just a "dreary expanse, white with alkali flats." When Armitage inspected his lots, he found a good deal of his real estate was flooded, and he needed a boat to locate the corners of his property.[40]

Fifty years later, a Soviet journalist, Semyon Nariniani, had a similar experience. He was sent on assignment to central Siberia, a few hundred miles north of Karaganda, to report on the newly built steel town of Magnitogorsk. As historian Stephen Kotkin tells the story, Nariniani rode the train for eight days, making five changes and waiting through many delays. One day, the train slowed in the midst of the empty steppe. Nariniani thought it was another breakdown, but the conductor called out, "Magnitogorsk!" Nariniani disembarked, looked around at the empty landscape, turned to the stationmaster and asked, "Is it far to the city?" "Two years," the man answered.[41]

In memoir after memoir, what seems to have bothered European

settlers of the plains and steppe the most was the emptiness: "the stillness with nothing behind it."[42] Soviet deportees refer automatically to the land they first encountered as "the naked steppe," devoid of water, trees, streams, houses, people—geography itself—empty of everything but space.[43] What most failed to mention was that the land was not empty but *emptied*.[44] They came to territory that had recently been cleared of the nomadic pastoralists and hunters who once populated it, people who lived off the arid grasslands by moving through them, following herds that grazed on a carpet of grasses and plants. Since humans cannot digest grass, exploiting animals that do is a rational way to use the dry range and steppe not suited for agriculture or intensive husbandry.[45] As the first settlers appeared in Kazakhstan and Montana and took up homesteads in fertile land along rivers, Kazakhs and Indians adjusted their economies accordingly, trading fur and meat with the newcomers for tools and commodities. It wasn't harmony and it wasn't an idyll of pastoral unity with nature, but it was life—a social system and economy that adapted adequately to the conditions of the plains and steppe.

But that is not the way Kazakhs and Indians were seen by the Europeans who came to colonize them. Nomadic pastoralists were understood as part of the landscape. They came to symbolize the savage and precarious past, which still loomed over the present on the frontier with terrifying force. When, for instance, high winds blew and unsettled the tent cities of Billings or Karaganda, or winter blizzards stranded people and livestock in blinding white confusion, it became clear how flimsy was the edifice white settlers occupied, an edifice linked only by a thin lifeline of steel rails to the distant sources of food and energy that kept their economies going. To Europeans, the unsettled nomad came to embody this cruel and undiscriminating nature. And so European colonizers constructed an ideological and principled crusade, casting themselves in the role of civilized man against primitive nature.

Most histories of Karaganda begin with the simple story of the Kazakh shepherd Appak Baizhanov, who one summer day in 1833 chased a fox into a hole.[46] Appak dismounted, dropped to his knees, and started digging out the foxhole. As he dug, he came across a piece of rock,

black as a raven and of a puzzling texture. He brought it back to the elders at camp, who could make nothing of the black stone and tossed it into the fire. The rock blazed up unnaturally and they grew frightened. The elders ruled that the stone must be a bad force and should not be touched again. "Of course, the nomads did not recognize coal," one Soviet historian instructs, "because the young shepherd and his elders were illiterate."[47]

The moral of the story is that Kazakhs lived in cruel ignorance, and it took the arrival of Russians, armed with science, to help them realize the potential of the riches that existed beneath their "barren land." In Soviet texts, Russians are "the big brothers" come to help Kazakhs, who are "one of the most backward nations in the prerevolutionary empire."[48] This is another way of saying the Kazakhs made poor subjects because they rode fast horses, fought well, and managed with their nomadic elusiveness to evade the tax collectors.[49] And so Soviet officials had no choice but to continue the work begun by tsarist officials, who had been trying for decades to colonize the Kazakhs by settling them and using the land suitable for tilling to grow cash crops for export. Since the Russian empire first took control of Kazakh territory in the 1820s, Kazakhs had been gradually pushed off good pastureland into the desert interior of Kazakhstan. The final blow, the equivalent of George Armstrong Custer's buffalo-slaughtering hunting trips, came in the early and mid-1930s, when Soviet reformers decided to collectivize Kazakh nomads and thus rationalize the production of meat and dairy products on sedentary collective farms.

Not far from Billings, a small marble marker stands in the brown grass, embossed with a simple Christian cross above the name George A. Custer, Major General. The story of Custer and his defeat by Crazy Horse at the battle of Little Big Horn is well known. So, too, are his infamous trips through the plains shooting bison and leaving behind the stench of rotting flesh. These ventures cloud his memorialization as a martyr on the battlefield. Custer was one of a number of Americans who felt that the extermination of the buffalo would inspire Indians to settle down.[50] He understood, as did Soviet collectivizers later, that to take away the roving sustenance of the indigenous grasslanders was a sure way to root them. In turn, rooting nomads and transforming the landscape would make it hard to remember "a time,"

as David Rollison puts it, "when the land was anything other than a commodity to be converted to cash."[51]

But even after the bison were turned into bleached bone, their memory brushed onto canvas, and the remaining Indians settled on the reservation to a form of semi-dependency, the neighboring Crow, who had served as allies of the U.S. Army fighting the Sioux and Cheyenne, came to represent a threat and nuisance to the leaders of Billings. Before all the original lots and homesteads were inhabited by white settlers, city leaders in Billings started itching for more *Lebensraum* and petitioned Congress to move the Crow from their territory south of Billings and open the land for settlement.[52] Frederick Billings and other entrepreneurs of the area wanted the Crow territory in order to build rail lines across it to the coal fields in Red Lodge, and, just as important, they sought to sanitize the valley of "troublesome Indians" who were held responsible for missing cattle. An editorialist wrote in the *Billings Post* in 1884, "It will be a great boon to this section, when these miserable, idle dogs are moved away, and this valuable section of land thrown open to the use of people who will utilize it."[53]

Perhaps neither Americans nor Soviets anticipated the extent to which forced settlement would exterminate not only the nomadic way of life but nomadic lives as well. Collectivization brought disaster to Kazakh pastoralists. Between 1929 and 1932, the livestock count dropped from 6.5 million head to 965,000. Of the total population of Kazakhs, estimated at 4.4 million in the late 1920s, by the mid-1930s 2 million were missing, having either died from famine or fled across the borders to China, Mongolia, or Afghanistan.[54] In Karaganda, by January 1933, only 15 percent of the indigenous Kazakhs remained.[55] In the Great Plains, the bison, which once roamed in immense black clouds totaling around twenty-five million, had by the 1880s been all but exterminated. Among American Indians, of the estimated precolonial population of 5 to 7 million, only 150,000 remained in 1900, 7 percent of the original population.[56]

American and Soviet reformers created the savage and the primitive by defining it against the civilized and the advanced, and in so doing they appropriated the power to exclude Indians and Kazakhs from their land and livelihood—a power deployed with destructive results. The project, however, did not cease with mass fatalities.

Surviving Indians and Kazakhs became subjects of social programs aimed at supervising and correcting their primitive ways. In Montana, the Bureau of Indian of Affairs sought to make Christians out of Indian pagans and farmers out of Indian hunters. Bureau agents banned sacred dances and seized religious objects in a demonstration of authority that often turned violent. Instead of the old traditions, Indians were to learn the new orthodoxies of American hard work by becoming private landowners and farmers in ideal Jeffersonian independence. In 1904 Montana governor S. C. Reynolds created the Crow Indian Industrial Fair, modeled on the Midwestern county fair, where Crow contestants won prizes for the best farm teams, biggest cabbages, and best-kept tipis. Meanwhile, at missionary boarding schools, Crow children learned to can fruits, milk cows, speak English, and recite the dictums of American Protestant values. The policy was successful, in part. By 1896 half the Crow lived in houses and grew their own food. But that statistic reveals only a fleeting moment of triumph. By the 1920s poverty, malnutrition, tuberculosis, and trachoma were so chronic on the Crow reservation that local agents calculated to a "mathematical certainty" that the Crow Indian would soon cease to exist.[57]

Like Indians, Kazakhs did not own land and tended to view ownership in communal terms. Even so, Soviet ethnographers found Kazakh tribal life to be poisoned by class relations and the feudal exploitation of the poor by the rich. And so Soviet reformers focused on disentangling Kazakh nomads from their livestock in order to affix the nomads to Soviet institutions, where they would learn true communal values, proletarian discipline, the Russian language, personal hygiene, and wage labor. Soviet reformers separated recalcitrant parents from their children, the best of whom were sent to orphanages to be retooled for life in a society based on science and technology. Anyone whom the NKVD suspected of holding back socialist development became a target for suppression. NKVD agents banned Kazakh mullahs from teaching Muslim texts, and disenfranchised and later arrested Kazakh leaders, the *aksakal* and *bai*.[58] They shut down mosques and opened in their stead "red yurts," where women and children learned to write, clean, and farm. Soviet communists photographed the happy Kazakhs swinging their pitchforks on the way to the fields, and they

too held fairs where the grower of the biggest melon and thresher of the most wheat mounted a bunting-festooned dais to receive a red ribbon with Lenin's profile looking forward to the future.[59]

Once European settlers had marginalized indigenous populations, the emptied spaces needed to be refashioned, and because the land was vacant (or vacated), there was nothing to stop its wholesale appropriation as productive, agricultural, and industrial territory. After the arrival of the railroad in Billings and Karaganda, European colonizers no longer occupied new land in a piecemeal fashion—a bend in the river here, a river valley there—but implanted a wholly new figurative and physical architecture on the landscapes. Railroad executives, U.S. Geological Survey officials, and Soviet officials spread out a purposeful map blanketing the landscape, dividing and subdividing territory according to function and use—mining, farming, ranching. And once space was divided according to function, so too were the lives that inhabited that space. Indians were to become farmers on land designated for that purpose. Kazakhs were to become collective farm members on land designated for that purpose. And new people were to be imported to fill the recently emptied spaces and implement the destiny described by the maps.

It is logical to think that cities emerge after the accumulation of a critical mass of people, but in Montana and Kazakhstan, this pattern was reversed. Cities came first, then people. Most of the settlers to the Yellowstone Valley arrived a full two decades after the founding of the Magic City. Saddled with a great deal of land bought on speculation, the founders of Billings worked in tandem with the railroad to entice homesteaders to the valley. Booster propaganda lied outright only at times; it usually misled by innuendo and cheerful exaggeration. The *Billings Gazette*:

> Below you lies miles and miles of cultivated farm land, the beautiful Yellowstone Valley, entrancing vistas of woodland and river greets the eye. Delightful attractions of well-laden orchards, with green and brown and yellow fields all dotted with dainty looking farm buildings and pretty red-roofed school houses, form a picture not readily forgotten. And at your feet, the loveliest gem in the beautiful setting, behold the charming city of Billings.[60]

The photo that accompanied this journalistic account shows a waterfall and thick forest, suggesting a shady, refreshing mountain idyll. Imagine the surprise of homesteaders when they arrived in Billings. Mrs. T. W. Wilkinson Polly, a Missouri native, remembered her first night: "It was a tearful set of women and children that evening. There was not a tree, hardly a blade of grass, only sagebrush and dusty streets and untidy surroundings, making it seem as if we had come to the last place on Earth."[61]

Mrs. Wilkinson Polly's tears flowed out of the realization that she and her family had been duped; they had spent their savings and gambled their singular futures on a swindle. The sun-baked flats and tent city could not be recognized as the Eden of the railroad ads and booster press accounts. Yet Mrs. Wilkinson Polly is written into history as a pioneering homesteader because she and her kin made their future themselves. Once they willingly entered the ideological frame of private property and Jeffersonian independence promoted by the railroad and real estate developers, they became the principal force of their own misery.

A few decades after the railroads went into the business of producing homesteaders for Montana, the NKVD took up the task of supplying deportees for the agricultural settlement of Kazakhstan.[62] In addition to KarLag, the NKVD deported tens of thousands of people to northern Kazakhstan to till the virgin but often agriculturally marginal land around growing new industrial centers like Karaganda.[63] To colonize and utilize the land most effectively, the Labor Colony department of the NKVD-Gulag gridded the land into 240,000 or 480,000-acre parcels for prospective collective farms, assigning an average of three hundred deported families to each farm.[64]

Maria Andzejevskaya was born in a Ukrainian village in the 1920s. One summer day in 1936, NKVD security agents knocked on the door and told Maria's parents they had a week to pack their things and report for resettlement in Kazakhstan. No one in the village knew where Kazakhstan was, but they were told it was to the south, where there was plenty of land for everyone to farm.[65] To many, resettlement, even if by force, sounded like good news; overcrowding and land hunger had plagued the sandy, swampy regions of central Ukraine for decades.[66] Maria and her family joined about half her village in packing up and loading their tools, furniture, and livestock on a train to Kazakhstan.

They were part of a mass deportation of over seventy thousand Soviet citizens of Polish and German descent, who in 1936 were deemed suspect of collusion with bourgeois Poland and Nazi Germany.[67] Maria's family rode the train for nearly a month, and when they finally disembarked from the cramped cattle cars in mid-September, the landscape had changed drastically. Maria described terrain that was empty except for a tall pole with a sign on it, labeled "settlement number two": "They told us we were going to Kazakhstan, and they would give us land and homes and we would live well. 'There's no winter, it's the south [they said],' 'everything will be perfect,' and then they dropped us off and there was nothing. The five of us children, mamma and papa, everyone cried, and then it was something horrible, night was coming, what would we do?"[68] Maria's family did what Mrs. Wilkinson Polly did. They built houses out of sod, and in their mud homes they put up with the dampness, snakes, and bugs. They made it through the first winter on their dwindling food stocks, and when those were gone they traded their clothing and dishes to Kazakhs for meat and flour. They learned how to gather up manure and brushwood to burn for heat in the long, subzero winters. They figured out the signs of a blizzard and how maybe to survive one if caught outside. In short, they learned to endure.

What is the difference between the homesteader and the deportee? At first glance, the two do not belong in the same category. Homesteaders went to Montana voluntarily to break the soil; deportees were rudely coerced from their homes and driven to the virgin Kazakh steppe. Yet, looked at more closely, the categories of free will and coercion begin to fuse. Mrs. Wilkinson Polly's family chose to move based on the hopeful view of Montana advertised by civic boosters and railroad advertisers; an NKVD officer conjured up a similarly rosy picture of Kazakhstan for Maria Andzejevskaya's family. Maria's family was offered no choice but to leave, but there is evidence that many of her neighbors were willing to go, and some even asked to be put on the deportation list so they could also try their fortunes in Central Asia, where there was plenty of untilled land—virgin soil, the same motivation for which Mrs. Wilkinson Polly made the long trek to Montana.[69]

Not to overdraw the comparison, once in Kazakhstan, Maria's family was legally restricted from leaving their village and had to report to a

local commandant every month.[70] Mrs. Wilkinson Polly's family could leave if they had someplace else to go and money to get there. In fact, they could be forced to leave if the crops failed and the bank foreclosed on their loans. Many will argue this difference in free will is essential, that to be held in place by decree is entirely different than to be held, or propelled, by debt. And they are quite right, yet these differences themselves point to a set of similarities that cast doubt on assumptions of incommensurability between the Soviet Union and United States. For in both categories, people became the willing and unwilling tools of larger projects to control huge territories by turning grassland into cash crops. In both territories, families were hoodwinked by visions of a better future. Once they arrived, both homesteaders and deportees expressed a sense of powerlessness, a hazy feeling that their lives were being controlled by outside forces.

Montanans regularly railed against the power of the corporations and the railroads, forces that seemed to seep everywhere, controlling them by setting prices, hiring, firing, overcharging, and underpaying them. In 1912 J. C. Murphy published a book-length diatribe against the corporations in Montana. An excerpt:

> Less than a decade of time had been required to bring the material wealth of the state under combine control . . . to acquire most of the tremendous water power and electric power resources of the state to one ownership . . . to bring the banking interests of the state practically under the domination of a single chain of banks owned by the same interest, to reduce the profits of wage earners and to make their condition in industrial centers little better than bond slaves, to transform the functions of a public press . . . into a perfectly organized machine for the suppression of knowledge . . . all this by lawless corporate combination . . . exercised by absentee bosses.[71]

The corporations remained incorporate, the bosses absentee. Murphy could not visualize the source of his subjection; it came from everywhere and embraced everything at once. In Karaganda, I asked a group of elderly people, former deportees, who was responsible for their imprisonment. The voices rang out immediately: "The System." "The Party." "Stalin." "Moscow." And what about the guards, the people

who are your neighbors now? Again, a chorus of replies: "It is not their fault. They had no choice. They were good people. They only did what they were ordered to do."[72]

Former deportees in Karaganda saw their lives caught in a "system" so immense it swallowed everyone, even the guards. Settlers in Montana at the turn of the century expressed a similar uneasiness about the corporations that seemed to overtake them at every turn. The "Company" and the "Party," two faceless, diffuse entities, encircled, or so it seemed, the lives of the people who lived in Kazakhstan and Montana so fully that they never caught sight of the incorporeal, ephemeral forces ruling them.

The first years the settlers and deportees plowed up the mineral-rich, virgin grasslands, crops grew impressively. During years of relatively high rainfall and mild temperatures, crops also thrived. Settlers in Kazakhstan remember fondly the years between 1937 and 1939, much as the boom years between 1909 and 1917 are still talked of in Montana.[73] But inevitably, drought followed rain. And with drought came dust. Soil, overtilled and uncovered, went airborne in the dry years. Settlers in Kazakhstan and Montana remark on dust so thick "you couldn't see the horses' ears." They mention the dust storms nearly as much as they do the locusts that fed mostly on the weakened crops but also ate through clothes and leather. Those were hungry years. And to make matters worse, when the price of wheat fell after World War I, dry land farmers in Montana were shadowed by bankers. Bernice McGee's father, a Norwegian immigrant, homesteaded a farm in the foothills above Billings. Every autumn, she said, her father would sell his crops and head for the bank to pay off the loan he had taken for seed and supplies the spring before. But after he paid the bank, there was no money left for the family to make it through the winter, so he would take out another loan, and the cycle of interests, payments, and anxiety would begin again.[74] For the deportees in Kazakhstan, tax rates rose each year, especially as World War II drew closer. Fifty years later, Maria still knows the tax rates by heart: "Thirty-six liters of milk. Eight kilos of refined butter a year. Two hundred kilograms of meat for every family a year. That was a whole cow!"[75]

The biggest obstacles to farming and living on the steppe and plains involved water, or the lack of it. Karaganda and Billings fall into the

same precipitation zone, where rainfall ranges from a drought-level eight inches to a cultivable seventeen inches a year. It was decided that farming could only be secured through irrigation, but irrigation seemed a fantasy when even drinking water was in short supply. In Karaganda, people had to cart water for miles by horse or camel. In Billings, residents paid fifty cents a barrel for water hauled from the Yellowstone River. Water was all that was needed to make the land fertile, but large-scale irrigation demanded a concentration of capital and labor well beyond the means of an individual farmer or even the collective energies of the surrounding urban communities. In Billings, the managers of the land company attracted settlers with the promise of "the Big Ditch" for two decades, but they never succeeded in building it. Only in 1900, when the federal government backed irrigation projects, was there enough capital to build a series of canals and reservoirs.[76] In Karaganda, where the central government dedicated hundreds of thousands of rubles to a twenty-four-kilometer canal, and KarLag had at its disposal a growing labor force swelling into the thousands, digging it still took four years and then supplied only the city and a few hundred acres of farmland.[77] Irrigation presents a metaphor for the large-scale settlement of the continental steppe. It takes the kind of money and concentration of labor and machinery that only government budgets, outside capital, and expertise could provide, which left the farmers of the arid steppe and plains in a state of dependency, waiting on the largesse of the state.[78]

In other words, small family farms, the kind Thomas Jefferson envisioned, did not prosper in the Great Plains. To have a predictably profitable crop year after year, farmers needed to irrigate, ideally employing heavy machinery and fortifying the soils with fertilizers. The long arch of agricultural development in Montana points to the replacement of small homesteads with large agribusiness farms, an American version of the collective farm, where fields are huge, machinery is a must, and a mobile labor force is needed to produce high-yield cash crops to pay for it all. At KarLag, the NKVD specialized in setting up large-scale farm-factories and even ran a model farm that pioneered dry-land farming techniques, much as Frederick Billings's son Parmly turned the family ranch into a model "scientific" operation.[79]

The experience of working on these large, corporate farms did not

Author with gulag survivor and Labor Army worker Ella Schmidt, at the KarLag site. Photo by David Bamford.

differ greatly between Kazakhstan and Montana. Margarete Buber, a German socialist living in the Soviet Union during the 1930s, was arrested and sent to KarLag in 1938, convicted of treasonous activity. Her story—that of a Soviet prisoner—has been told many times. She suffered cold and hunger, slept on hard planks in dirty huts infested with bugs. She worked in the beet fields in KarLag, harvested and threshed grain, hauled water to the fields, shoveled manure, dug ditches on a railroad crew, sorted vegetables, and weeded a truck garden. She recounts the two years she spent in KarLag as a time of perpetual motion. As one job finished, she would be marched with a gang of fellow prisoners to another location in the vast camp and assigned a new job. The gulag system she described as a "slave trust": "Wherever labor is needed, the GPU [State Political Police] sends its prisoners. They fell timber in Central Siberia and Karelia, work in heavy industries in the Urals, cultivate the steppes of Kazakhstan, mine gold in Kolyma, build towns in the Far East of Siberia."[80]

In 1942 the NKVD created a second, even larger "slave trust," a migratory stratum of workers called the "Labor Army." On August 28, 1941, a date nearly every adult in Karaganda knows, the Supreme Soviet sent out an executive order to deport people of German heri-

tage east, to Kazakhstan and Siberia. The government feared these Soviet citizens would serve as a fifth column for the invading German army.[81] As a consequence, more than a million citizens of German descent were uprooted and transferred thousands of miles during the first months of war. The NKVD conscripted the transplanted Soviet-German deportees, among others, into a Labor Army to serve in the Asiatic rear of the country manufacturing, mining, and farming to support the Red Army at the front.

In Billings, of course, there was no NKVD to organize labor. But there were large beet farms and far more beets than any single farming family could sow, weed, harvest, and ship to the Billings sugar refinery. Meanwhile, in New York at the turn of the century, relatives of the same families of Russian-Germans were arriving on Ellis Island in their homespun clothes, speaking an archaic German dialect. Few knew English, but some saw the Milwaukee Railroad posters of the farmer, biceps bulging, plowing up a field of gold coins over a map of the railroad running straight through Billings. Others were enticed by a railroad recruiter in Russia with a cheap ticket to the Great Plains. The Russian-Germans came most often with no cash or assets, and few could afford to buy land and establish their own farms. Instead, colonies of Russian-Germans became part of the sugar-beet labor force throughout the Great Plains, working the fields in Nebraska, Kansas, Idaho, and Montana.[82] In Russia, they had farmed independently; in North America, they entered the world of agricultural wage labor.

It was a precarious world to inhabit. Work came sporadically and was remunerated halfheartedly. The winters were long, unproductive, and unpaid. In the summers, parents and their children spent the daylight hours in the fields crawling along the rows of beets, blocking, thinning, and weeding. The backbreaking, punishing hours in the fields paid off for some families, who managed to save enough to buy their own farms. But other families remained on the migrant labor circuit for decades, and their ranks grew in the drought periods when farms were lost to banks. The family of "David K.," for instance, emigrated from south Russia in 1903. Three decades later, in 1936, a social worker for the state relief administration found the family "living in a dilapidated, two-room shack," unheated and so cold she had to keep her coat on during the interview. In the 1920s David K. and his wife had bought a small farm on credit. "But one year there was no rain, so

there was no crop; next year there was too much rain and black rust ruined the crop; next year frost destroyed much of the crop, and each year thereafter some reverse caused loss."[83] Once, cholera killed the hogs, and later a train ran over the horses. In short, the farm had not prospered. David K. had sold it, bought a used car, and set out with his family, rolling through the fields of North Dakota, Idaho, and California as migrant laborers, where they farmed "onions, potatoes and especially beets." David K.'s wife bore eleven children, and the interviewer found her "in poor health, physically run-down and very shabbily dressed," her youngest child nursing at the breast. Three boys were undernourished and "so poorly clad as to be conspicuous." The little girl, Rose, was "unkempt and suffered from a cold and skin ailment." No one in the family had finished grade school. Most had not made it past the third grade.[84]

Germans from Russia weed beet fields just beyond Billings; Germans from Russia weed beet fields near Karaganda. The processes by which the two groups became migrant laborers were quite different, and again the difference hinges on the element of coercion and free will. However, the outcome—membership in a migrant labor force—was quite similar, as was the quality of life. Russian-Germans in Karaganda and Montana were related not only by family ties but also as subjects of a new kind of expanding agricultural discipline based on cheap and mobile labor.[85] The conditions that encompassed their lives—meager living quarters, long work hours, low pay, few chances for advancement, and continual mobility—bonded them long after time and events broke up their German colonies in Russia. Thanks to migration, legal and illegal, there has never been a sustained shortage of unskilled laborers in the United States. The glut of immigrants and all the disparate, untamed forces of the market produced the same kind of mobile, inexpensive labor force that the NKVD generated with its centrally planned charts, mobilization orders, requisitioned trains, and armed soldiers. The invisible hand of the market and the whimsical breezes of U.S. immigration policy sutured together a migrant labor force on the level of that conscripted by the NKVD, with hardly a flourish of weapons.

There are, of course, other differences between deportees to Kazakhstan and homesteaders of Montana. A major difference is memory. Montana pioneers are lionized as men and women who, with courage

and the sweat of their brow and a heap of other slogans, remade the West, fought off Indians, broke the virgin soil, and in so doing symbolized the freedom and independence of the American way. The deportees, on the other hand, are memorialized as victims of a heartless, impersonal regime. They stand as an icon of suffering in histories of the Soviet Union.[86] Driven across the steppe and deposited on a windswept plain, they are often shown in photographs as hungry children with ribs like knives and pinched women burdened with crying infants. The pioneer, by contrast, is a man, axe in hand, jaw jutting, all determination. No one needed to help a pioneer; he did for himself.

Ex-convicts and deportees in Kazakhstan are attached to the memory of themselves as victims of a cruel regime. This is the metanarrative of their lives, and they feel no remorse for the loss of the nomad, nor do they romanticize life on the agricultural and industrial frontier. The difference in the West lies in the impulse to remember. If you travel through Montana, the stylized ghosts of the past haunt billboards and roadside stands: the dead Indian, the dead pioneer, the long-gone cowboy, the withered family farm, the displaced miner. Teenagers in American cities, most of whom will never exchange their sweat for wages, walk about in the heavy denim of the farmers' Carhartts; suburbanites negotiate manicured avenues in the rugged jeeps of ranchers. James Bryce's premonition has come true: America's restless, feverish passion for quick results has kicked up a nostalgia for a past plowed under to make room for an ever-receding future. This grief for what has been paved over is integral to modern life; it is a sign that in the United States, more than in the former Soviet Union, the destruction that accompanies a successfully expanding modernity has been far more complete.

On a cold, rainy Sunday, the first winter winds drive the rain like lead pellets against the windows of the German Cultural Center of Karaganda. A group of senior citizens who were once conscripts in the Labor Army sit around a long table. They all have stories to tell about their role in the creation of industrial space in Kazakhstan, and they tell them all at once, in a chorus of voices describing the long years of work, insults, want, and need, as well as the small acts of kindness and camaraderie that helped them survive. From the corner, a small woman began to speak, Maria Weimar:

> They brought us here [to Karaganda] to Mine Number 89. As soon as we arrived they placed us in the zone. There was a high fence, on top, three rows of barbed wire. On every corner there were guard towers, and there was a checkpoint. We were escorted to work, at the mine where all of us lined up for roll call. At seven in the morning we were led out and at eight we were already supposed to be at work in the mine. We worked twelve-hour shifts . . . We worked from eight in the morning until eight at night . . . The conveyor went by and we picked out slag. You had to grab the rocks quickly all day. Twelve hours without a break.[87]

In Pittsburgh, Polish immigrants worked in steel mills, twelve hours a day, seven days a week. If they wanted a day off, they worked a twenty-four-hour shift. In the Urals, Soviet-Polish conscripts mined ore in twelve-hour shifts, the same period Maria Weimar spent daily underground, every day but one, from 1943 until 1947. In Virginia, during World War I, boys in the coal breakers, their shoulders hunched in the chill and for fear of the foreman, bent over the conveyor belts and picked through slag. Decades later, the children-turned-old-men describe the breakers as "hell" and complain most, as does Maria Weimar, of blistered, cut hands, ripped hour after hour on the jagged rocks. The boys worked out of need and fear, much like Maria did in Mine Number 89 in Karaganda. The same machines, the same hierarchies and rush for production, the same endless days and fatal accidents, clogged air, ragged lungs, fragmented bodies, and flat, beaten stares. It comes as no surprise that in the realm of labor history the names, dates, and places begin to blur into one long, muscle-aching sigh.

A sigh that indicates the physical experience of industrial labor differs little whether under capitalism or communism, because the same grid stretched over not only space but time, the process of production, and, consequently, lives.[88] Time was gridded into schedules (set and calibrated by the railroad); materials were graphed into production quotas; bodies were regimented into units. As such, it is possible to leave Karaganda and retire to another war, another place: Butte, Montana, in 1917. Miners dug in thousands of miles of underground tunnels to produce copper for the American war effort. Foremen for the Anaconda Mining Company continually raised production quotas to

meet the demand, and miners were stretched to the last breath of their reserve. The farther they burrowed below ground, the higher the temperatures rose; at two thousand feet down, the temperature reached 117 degrees.[89] Dust from the drills swirled in the dank air together with the odors of man and beast, blasting powder, rotting food, and spit-drenched tobacco. Above ground, sulfurous fumes billowed up, floating over exposed heaps of roasting ore. Residents walked about town with damp rags tied over their mouths and lanterns at midday. One of the copper kings, William A. Clark, claimed the fumes were vital to health as a disinfectant for disease. The airborne arsenic, he asserted, gave Butte women their beautiful, pale complexions.[90] It was a scene Dante would have recognized even before the night of June 8, when a flume of fire roared through a mine shaft and caused the death of 168 men in the worst hard-rock mining disaster in U.S. history.

After the explosion, the Metal Mine Workers' Union called for additional safety measures. When the company refused the union's demands, fifteen thousand workers shut down the mines, and for the second time in a few years martial law was installed in Butte. For the next year and a half, troops from the National Guard ruled Butte from the thick-walled respectability of the county courthouse. In the meantime, the state legislature passed the Montana Sedition Act banning "disloyal" speeches and literature, legalizing deportation, and outlawing the Wobblies. Pinkerton detectives snuck about the city, trying to infiltrate and uncover seditious organizations. The Wobblies still went to the picket lines, however, with other unions, and in April 1920, troops opened fire on picketers in front of the Neversweat mine, killing two and injuring thirteen others. After that incident, the governor canceled the National Guard and called in U.S. Army regulars, who monitored the city while work resumed in the mines.

Yet to imply that Butte was an armed camp during the years of the city's biggest boom would be an oversimplification. Most miners did not need guns and soldiers to compel them to work. They went willingly; their paychecks and the need to cover bills and gambling debts kept them underground. And after the war, when the demand for copper fell off, miners lived in perpetual fear of being shut out of the mines. Besides, it was underground, in the zone of free-labor relations, not above ground in the midst of violent corporation-versus-labor confrontation, where more miners perished by far. Locals in

Butte today calculate death based on the work week. They say one miner died for every week of the hundred years the mines functioned. The official estimate of death by accident falls short of local lore, at two thousand; however, no one knows how many miners died of lung diseases and "natural" causes that shrunk life expectancy and left the city full of widows.

The similarities between Kazakhstan and Montana center on the transformation of two rapidly industrializing, growing, voraciously hungry countries from small-scale, local economies to economies of national and imperial magnitude powered by cheap fossil fuels. By enticing and coercing, by offering opportunities laced with threats, by dividing time, space, and materials into discrete units, Soviet functionaries and American capitalists found it possible to line up bodies to build and extract, and to build the machines that would build more machines and make it easier and faster to extract more. The machines, and the people that followed them, demanded more coal, steel, ore, oil, and gas, and ever more lives. None of these resources were renewable, except for the people. Between 1880 and 1900, 700,000 workers died on the job in the United States.[91] Between 1934 and 1940, 239,000 forced laborers died in Soviet labor camps.[92] These fatalities did not slow industrial expansion, because immigrants, legal and illegal, have always flooded U.S. borders, and in the Soviet Union more "enemies of the people" could always be uncovered, and babies could be endlessly generated. (In 1935, at the height of the industrialization drive, the Soviet government outlawed abortion and made mothers of ten or more children "heroes.") As it happened, for decades, the same teeming Central European countryside supplied both fledgling superpowers with an incessant source of able bodies. But the story does not end there. As industrial space gridded the landscape, populations of migrants and prisoners were segmented as well, by class and ethnicity.

Now, tourists speeding along Interstate 90 in Montana can stop in Butte for a few minutes and stroll out to a platform extending over the Berkeley Pit, once the "richest hill on Earth," now a cavity a mile wide and a mile deep, filled with toxins left over from a century of mining. On the platform, it doesn't take long to listen to the recorded message that describes the history of the pit and the wealth that was dug from

the buff-colored cliffs, and when the message dies out, tourists can hear the eerie whizzing signals that warn off birds from landing in the pit, which is acidic enough to liquefy steel. While tourists stare into the country's largest Superfund cleanup site, what they no longer see are the neighborhoods that used to ramble over the hill that is now negative space.

Although nearly half of the city has been voided, residents of Butte still recite a mental geography established during the mining days. On the east side, they say, the Irish lived up the hill in Dublin Gulch, above the Finns in Finntown, which gave the Irish gangs the advantage in bombarding the Finnish gangs during their regular brawls. Italians and Slavs lived in Meaderville, now an imaginary space over the pit, and on the precipice of the pit, in the Cabbage Patch, lived Mexicans, Indians, and African Americans, who had houses so transitory that today only empty gridded lots have endured. On the west side of town stand the Victorian mansions of the copper kings. The mansions have castlelike turrets from which one can survey the miners' homes huddled next to the mines' black headframes.

In Karaganda, as in Butte, residents were sorted by class, ethnicity, and race. By 1941, forty-one thousand prisoners worked in KarLag, and thousands of deportees arrived every month, swelling the city's population. Soldiers patrolled the streets, while prisoners marched from walled barrack zones to fenced-off labor sites. The fenced zones were important because the NKVD needed to segregate a complex hierarchy of prisoners incarcerated along a sliding scale of unfreedom—political prisoners, German POWs, Soviet citizens of German and Polish descent interned for the war, and regular prisoners convicted on criminal charges.[93] Soviet-German Labor Army conscripts lived in one zone. German POWs lived in another, next to but separate from Japanese POWs. As the war continued, more and more suspect ethnic groups streamed into the region under guard: Ukrainians, Poles, Kalmyks, Bashkirs, Chechens.[94] Each group was assigned a village or zone and told they could not venture from their homes. The zone system meant that most people generally remained where they were deposited, which strengthened ethnic ties and minority allegiances—ironically, the very traits for which these people were deported. But even when given a choice, the free populations of Rus-

sians and Kazakhs sought to live segregated from each other. At most factories, Russians and Kazakhs lived in separate dorms, but in one factory, Russian and Kazakh workers had to share a bunkhouse, and the workers constructed a wall down the middle to divide the space.[95]

What does the NKVD's enforced, zoned, and policed segregation of prisoners and exiles have to do with immigrant ethnic groups in Butte who chose to live in separate neighborhoods? It makes sense that immigrants would seek a cushion of common language and culture to soften the blow of migration and assimilation. What is strange, however, is that in 1905 a Pole from Silesia, in the south in the Habsburg empire, had little in common with a Pole from Mazuria, who was a citizen of tsarist Russia. These two Poles arrived from different political states; they practiced different customs and spoke different dialects of Polish, if not mutually incomprehensible languages. What compelled Mazurians and Silesians, who would have little in common in the old world, to join into one Polish community in the new world?

The forces that hammered Poles and other immigrant groups into discrete ethnic enclaves belonged to the industrial age. Between 1880 and 1920 in the United States, the way people worked and produced goods altered significantly, which in turn influenced how people lived and where. Corporate bureaucracies organized production from the top down. As production decisions moved up a lengthening hierarchy, skilled laborers were replaced by foremen supervising unskilled workers. Relations between foremen and workers slid into mutual aggression as the foremen were pressed to continually increase production, and in so doing threatened workers with dismissal and pay cuts.[96] Workers responded by organizing in unions. In order to fight the unions, firms altered their hiring practices, tending to employ immigrant laborers, who, because of their primitive knowledge of English, were less likely to unionize. On the shop floor, immigrant workers were grouped together by language to allow work to progress more smoothly, and gradually the workplace became segregated. At the same time, native-born workers began to resent the strikebreaking, wage-lowering immigrants and excluded them from their social and residential circles outside the workplace. Immigrants were relegated to the lowest tier of labor and were promoted far more slowly than native-born workers. This and the experience of being labeled

"foreign," "alien," and "inferior" brought members of ethnic groups together in a defensive posture. Immigrant neighborhoods, then, with their ethnic churches, schools, and fraternal orders, embodied a circle-the-wagon mentality. Each group tried to carve out its own space within hazy and porous borders defined as "nationality," which gangs of young men patrolled to inhibit others from crossing the invisible lines of race and class.[97]

In other words, the ethnic segmentation of Butte and Karaganda had less to do with race than with discipline. As hierarchies and values were used to segregate and standardize stages of production along an assembly line, they also worked to normalize and segregate workers inside and outside the factory. The gridded spaces that first arranged on a huge scale the settling of Central Asia and the Great Plains made a lasting stamp on the nature of the lives that took up residence on the plains and steppe, because at some point the abstract survey lines turned into boundaries. Boundaries fix labels in space, defining who is inside and who is outside. But boundaries can be porous, and so gradually boundary lines in Montana and Kazakhstan transformed into walls, laws, and social custom, which worked to define who was alien and who was native, who was a prisoner and who a guard, who lived in the migrant camp and who on the affluent east side. Perhaps for this reason, the same grid stretches across the American West and Soviet Central Asia—not only because of topography and efficiency but because the edifice of modernist dichotomies constructed urban spaces that employed the grid as the most effective means to control space by blocking it off into discrete and ever-divisible units. Each unit could be marked for exclusion or reward; each could be arranged in a hierarchy, supervised and observed in a constant division between the normal and the abnormal.

Despite the fact that both the United States and Soviet Union were founded on revolution and grew through rapid urbanization, leaders in both countries distrusted the revolutionary and spontaneous quality of urban space and worked to destroy it. With straight lines and the force of the grid, Soviet and American leaders planned new "garden cities" cut through with wide, rebellion-proof avenues that negated the unpredictability and anarchy of nineteenth-century cities.[98] As a result, both expanding American corporate power and expanding

Soviet party-state power etched an antirevolutionary conservatism onto twentieth-century urbanscapes. Perhaps for this reason, Karaganda and Billings do not radiate the energy of New York or Moscow but instead a feeling of listless suspension, of containers waiting to be filled, of the utopia of what Foucault calls the "perfectly governed city." It is this utopian wish for gridded order and discipline that links the railroad city of Billings with the prison city of Karaganda.

Even after World War II ended, Maria Weimar continued to work as before in Mine Number 89 as a Labor Army conscript. Some things changed: the bread ration was raised from 800 grams to a kilogram—"No one will starve on a kilogram of bread a day," she says—and the mine administrators organized a club for cultural enlightenment, where the conscripts gathered in the evenings to play music and dance. And then, one morning in 1947, Maria rose as usual, stepped outside, heading for the cafeteria, and noticed that the fence that had held her in for so long was laying on its side:[99]

> We walked out of the barracks, saw the fence, and we were frightened. "Oh, the fence fell down," I said. No one told us anything. We didn't move. We were afraid to go out. How could we go out? The head of the column walked up. He was a good man, and he said, "You are free, ladies. You are free to go wherever you want." We said to each other, "We've gotten used to it here. Where would we go?"[100]

A few decades before the barbed wire fence fell in Karaganda, another mine shutdown occurred in Butte and another farm was foreclosed near Billings; the rusted economic links in the chain of production were falling away. One less farmer was tied to the bank mortgage; another group of miners was released from the boiling recesses of the mines. Without their fence, Maria and her fellow prisoners wondered what they would do, for without it, they no longer had home, jobs, or sustenance, however meager. After World War I, unemployed miners in Butte twisted their blackened faces with similar fears. When the mine company seized up and refused to exploit them any further, miners took to the streets in protest to defend their dangerous jobs, low-paying salaries, and right to breathe poisonous air. Perhaps we do not have to look far to explore the nature of our prisons, if we allow the term some metaphorical license. What we rarely question is the fatal

attraction to our chains, to the consumptive urges that drive us deeper into labor and then remorse for what our labor has destroyed. We have been conscripted to build our own fences, and we like them, or at least get used to them, so that, like Maria, a sigh of regret wheezes from the icy fog when they fall away.