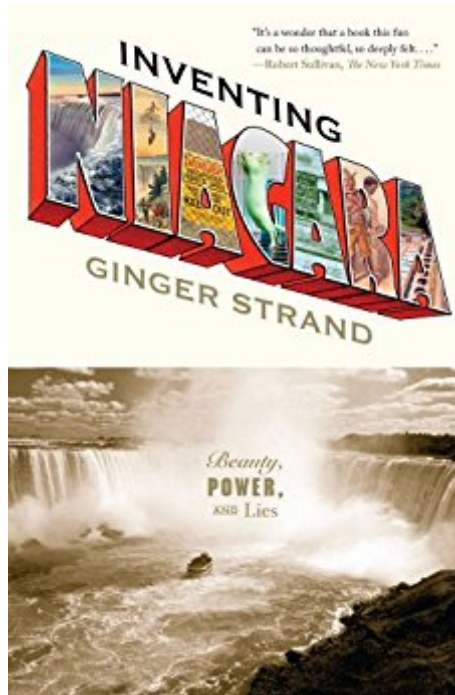




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Inventing Niagara: Beauty, Power, And Lies



Synopsis

Americans call Niagara Falls a natural wonder, but the Falls aren't very natural anymore. In fact, they are a study in artifice. Water diverted, riverbed reshaped, brink stabilized and landscape redesigned, the Falls are more a monument to man's meddling than to nature's strength. Held up as an example of something real, they are hemmed in with fakery -- waxworks, haunted houses, IMAX films and ersatz Indian tales. A symbol of American manifest destiny, they are shared politely with Canada. Emblem of nature's power, they are completely human-controlled. Archetype of natural beauty, they belie an ugly environmental legacy still bubbling up from below. On every level, Niagara Falls is a monument to how America falsifies nature, reshaping its contours and redirecting its force while claiming to submit to its will. Combining history, reportage and personal narrative, *Inventing Niagara* traces Niagara's journey from sublime icon to engineering marvel to camp spectacle. Along the way, Ginger Strand uncovers the hidden history of America's waterfall: the Mohawk chief who wrested the Falls from his adopted tribe, the revered town father who secretly assisted slave catchers, the wartime workers who unknowingly helped build the Bomb and the building contractor who bought and sold a pharaoh. With an uncanny ability to zero in on the buried truth, Strand introduces us to underwater dams, freaks of nature, mythical maidens and 280,000 radioactive mice buried at Niagara. From LaSalle to Lincoln to Los Alamos, Mohawks to Marilyn, Niagara's story is America's story, a tale of dreams founded on the mastery of nature. At a time of increasing environmental crisis, *Inventing Niagara* shows us how understanding the cultural history of nature might help us rethink our place in it today.

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Customer Reviews

Having grown up in the city of Niagara Falls, NY, I truly appreciate how Ms. Strand has chronicled the demise of the city over the past two centuries. Avarice were/are the primary factors that led, and continue to lead, the politicians of this once thriving town to sell out to seedy developers, whose only interest is to make money off their ill advised schemes. Essentially the politicians of the 1960-70's did the most damage to the city, with their "urban renewal" projects that decimated the historic downtown and thereby ruined the tourist trade forever in the city, while creating a ghost town full of empty useless buildings and structures that serve no purpose. It's a sad place to visit as it continues to go into decline with each passing decade. Meanwhile across the border in Canada, the tourist trade is bigger than ever.

An idiosyncratic, first person look at Niagara Falls. She has a journalist's bent, not a historian's, and this is neither a guide book for the curious nor a deeply researched history. With a brief overview of the history of the falls, she move on to interview people that catch her interest. The owners of two of Clifton Hill's tourist stops are made somewhat interesting; she indulges in her own gentle sarcastic commentary in lieu of any attempt at objective conclusions.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and it made me want to go to Niagra Falls and follow the author's footsteps. She approaches the topic from several different fascinating and rather quirky perspectives. The writing style is engaging as well, a very nice balance of scholarly and breezy. My only very small complaint: although I enjoyed a lot of the details of her research process, I sometimes found the personal details and humor a little grating over the long haul. That said, I would still highly recommend this book to anyone interested in history, travel, the environment, art, feminism, or pop culture.

I grew up near to Niagara Falls, NY and just enjoyed it as a place to take company to see the Falls.

Ms Strand has done a marvelous job of researching and describing the many strands that weave together to make the history of Niagara Falls. I was enthralled at the many concepts she presented that encompass the area, and agree with her. This book is not a tour book but full of history from many angles.

Ginger, I am being quite informal here, is a self described fanatic about Niagara Falls. So am I. Thus, while reading her book I felt like I had found a long lost friend. We could converse (although she could not hear me!) the many subjects about the lost Niagara, the damaged Niagara, the changed Niagara, the abused Niagara; well I could go on and on. (I wish someone could force the power companies, for one lousy day, to let the water flow naturally but I digress.....) Here's what I suggest. If you are one of these people that goes to Niagara Falls and can look for a few hours and be content to move on to the casinos or Clifton Hill entertainment (ie Ripley's, haunted houses, water slides) then you are not going to appreciate this book very much. However, if you really want to know some real "geeky" (my kids word for me, alas) stuff about hydro power, chemical landfills, misplaced mice killed by radiation, etc. then you will probably adore this book, as I did. The book scores on many levels.

Wow. I grew up near Niagara falls and we visited often. It remains one of my favorite places. I've only begun the book, but am very pleasantly surprised by the writing style and content. Very hard to put down once you start reading.

Good book on pollution in Niagara frontier, Buffalo.

Was a gift for a friend & was thoroughly enjoyed by that person; according to the reports by that person who was checking family history.

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