



River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West

By *Rebecca Solnit*

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The world as we know it today began in California in the late 1800s, and Eadweard Muybridge had a lot to do with it. This striking assertion is at the heart of *Rebecca Solnit's* new book, which weaves together biography, history, and fascinating insights into art and technology to create a boldly original portrait of America on the threshold of modernity. The story of Muybridge—who in 1872 succeeded in capturing high-speed motion photographically—becomes a lens for a larger story about the acceleration and industrialization of everyday life. Solnit shows how the peculiar freedoms and opportunities of post–Civil War California led directly to the two industries—Hollywood and Silicon Valley—that have most powerfully defined contemporary society.

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- Sales Rank: #401539 in eBooks
- Published on: 2004-03-02
- Released on: 2004-03-02
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In the 1870s, at a racetrack built by railroad baron Leland Stanford, Eadweard Muybridge invented high-speed photography. With his camera, he cut time into fractions of a second and laid it out in slices. Never before had human eyes seen a trotting horse distinctly, and the photographs astounded horsemen and artists, especially when Muybridge set the film in motion and the horse reeled fluidly across the screen. Today it is difficult to understand the pictures' impact, but 2001 NBCC finalist Solnit (As Eve Said to the Serpent) vividly recreates the wonder that greeted those primitive movies. Although she points her lens at Muybridge, her true subject is the perceptual revolution of the 19th century when the railroad, the telegraph and the camera transformed the experience of space and time. English-born Muybridge launched his career in 1867 with scenes of Yosemite and San Francisco. He soon began the experiments with "instantaneous" photography that led to the famous motion studies. Except for its most dramatic moments—the murder of his wife's lover, a suit against Stanford—the photographer's life remains obscure. Insistent on writing a biography nonetheless, Solnit pads the book with an account of workers' strikes, an aside on Victorian geology and other irrelevant details. Left to speculate about Muybridge's inspirations, she attributes much to a head injury resulting from a stagecoach accident. Her claims about Stanford and Muybridge as the progenitors of Silicon Valley and Hollywood are equally unsubstantiated. If the book fails as biography, however, it succeeds as a critical essay on Muybridge's art and a reflection on the meaning of space and time. B&w photos.

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Cultural historian Solnit, an original and penetrating thinker with a gift for inventive metaphors and syntactical grace whose previous books include *Wanderlust* (2000), brings her fascination with the American West, photography, and technology's impact on the environment and culture to the story of the man who made motion pictures possible, photographer Eadweard Muybridge. An Englishman turned California bookseller, superb landscape photographer, inventor, murderer (he killed his wife's lover), and pioneer in stop-action photography and the study of animals, including humans, in motion, Muybridge is fascinating and significant, as is his turbulent milieu. Solnit recounts Muybridge's strange life and immensely influential work within the context of the tragic war against Native Americans, and ties his achievements to the world-changing repercussions of photography and the railroads in particular, and industrialization in general. Her exhilarating argument leads her to declare that California, home of Hollywood and Silicon Valley, is the true capital of modernism, and to claim that we haven't even begun to come to terms with its legacy: our estrangement from nature and utter immersion in the mesmerizing "river of shadows," the endless stream of images generated via film, video, and computer. Masterly and creative, Solnit's far-roaming synthesis is as unsettling as it is compelling. *Donna Seaman*

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Review

"One finds it hard to remember what things looked like before this book appeared in the world." —**The New York Times Book Review**

"The imagery of a poet, the ideas of a theoretician, the rhythm of a thoroughbred and the force of a Southern Pacific locomotive." —**San Francisco Chronicle**

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Carol Castaneda:

As people who live in the modest era should be revise about what going on or data even knowledge to make these individuals keep up with the era which is always change and make progress. Some of you maybe may update themselves by studying books. It is a good choice in your case but the problems coming to you actually is you don't know what one you should start with. This River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West is our recommendation so you keep up with the world. Why, because book serves what you want and want in this era.

Barbara Kimmel:

Playing with family in the park, coming to see the coastal world or hanging out with close friends is thing that usually you will have done when you have spare time, after that why you don't try point that really opposite from that. Just one activity that make you not experience tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition of knowledge. Even you love River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West, it is possible to enjoy both. It is excellent combination right, you still need to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh can happen its mind hangout guys. What? Still don't obtain it, oh come on its identified as reading friends.

Danny Floyd:

In this period globalization it is important to someone to receive information. The information will make a professional understand the condition of the world. The healthiness of the world makes the information simpler to share. You can find a lot of personal references to get information example: internet, paper, book, and soon. You will see that now, a lot of publisher that print many kinds of book. Often the book that recommended to your account is River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West this book consist a lot of the information with the condition of this world now. This kind of book was represented how can the world has grown up. The dialect styles that writer value to explain it is easy to understand. Often the writer made some exploration when he makes this book. Honestly, that is why this book appropriate all of you.

Lisa Gregory:

Within this era which is the greater individual or who has ability to do something more are more important than other. Do you want to become considered one of it? It is just simple method to have that. What you must do is just spending your time little but quite enough to get a look at some books. On the list of books in the top checklist in your reading list is usually River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West. This book and that is qualified as The Hungry Slopes can get you closer in growing to be precious person. By looking upwards and review this reserve you can get many advantages.

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