

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 366 TRANSCRIPT

**Steve Skrovan:** Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my cohost, David Feldman. Hello, David.

**David Feldman:** Hello, everybody.

**Steve Skrovan:** Nice to have you here. And the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Hello, everybody. Get ready for a real feast here about land.

**Steve Skrovan:** NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] is cruising a brand-new Rover on Mars and companies like SpaceX [Space Exploration Technologies Corp.] are accepting applications for commercial astronauts. Humans have long fantasized about settling other planets, but for a little while at least, we're stuck earthbound. So how do we balance sustainable occupation of the earth with the demands of an expanding global consumer class. It's complicated, but our relationship to land has always been complex. And with our first guest, Simon Winchester, we'll be digging into humankind's history of claiming, exploiting and fighting over pieces of the earth. As always, we will check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, is this land your land? Is this land my land? David?

**David Feldman:** Simon Winchester is a journalist and the author of several books, including *The Professor and the Madman*, *The Men Who United the States* and *The Map That Changed the World*. His latest is *Land: How the Hunger For Ownership Shaped the Modern World*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*, Simon Winchester.

**Simon Winchester:** Well, thank you, David.

**Ralph Nader:** This is an extraordinary book, listeners. It's 400 pages of gripping narrative through history, geography. Simon Winchester went to a number of these areas that he's describing. It deals with traditional land sharing methods [and] the notion of Anglo-Saxon ownership. The land is shrinking as the seas are rising. It's an amazing tour that he takes the readers. It really – without exaggeration – should be in every library in the country. It should be a reading in law schools that have an extremely narrow conception of property ownership and have no horizon about the multiple significance of land, the struggles that are going [on] over it. So I want to start, Simon, with your fascination as a person who grew up in United Kingdom with the American notion of trespass and how that compares with Scotland and Sweden.

**Simon Winchester:** I found it quite extraordinary that here, this is after all the country that invented barbed wire and where when you buy a piece of land, you're reminded that you acquire what is called the bundle of rights. With the title, the bundle of rights includes the right to exclude anyone you choose from your land, and you have an absolute right to call the police to enforce that exclusion. Why it is such a dominant feature of American land ownership when in, let us say Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and now, as you mentioned, Scotland, and this is a

creeping phenomenon in Northern Europe at least, why the idea of what the Swedes call *allemansrätten*, all men's rights is not incorporated here? In Sweden, it has long been the tradition, the law, in fact, that providing you behave yourself, you can walk, occupy yourself on anyone's land, no matter who owns it. You can't go into their living room and demand coffee. You can't go into their garden and sunbathe. But if they are in a meadow or a pasture or a forest, you have an absolute right guaranteed in law--providing, as I say, you behave properly, you don't start digging it up or exploding weapons on it--to be on it.

And mercifully this right has now extended itself in the last decade to Scotland. And I have a good friend who has a sizable estate in the far north of Scotland, and it's a farming estate. He raises cattle and sheep and deer. He does forestry. He does arable farming. And 10 years ago, if he saw anyone walking – and the Scots are great walkers, walking across the landscape, he had the right to exclude them. He never did. He happened to be a very nice and liberally minded man. But now he sees people all over the place and provided they behave themselves, they're more than welcomed. The law protects their right to be there. The whole country – as it were at least the rights to be in the country – belong to everyone. And to me, that seems a sensible and logical way of handling things and not barbed wire dominated policy of exclusion, for which in some states, you can be shot if you trespass and you would find the courts pretty sympathetic to the landowner in keeping you off with force. That, to me, seems quite monstrous.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, to broaden that even further, and we're going to get to the land trust movement in the US [United States]. There are over 250 land trusts. And one in particular, [in] Massachusetts, as Simon Winchester describes. On page 402 of your book, to show you that there are other ways land has been treated, you say, “Naively idealistic, one might reasonably say and yet the mantra of those from whom we took the lands in the first place was all too often just that. Sharing land is by no means a revolutionary idea. The Aboriginal Australians, the Maori, the Canadian First Nation population, the Inuits who inhabit the high latitudes from Siberia to Alaska, and back again, the Aztecs, the Incas, the North American Indians. To all and each of these land was a commodity so precious and so life-giving that it was indeed to be shared by all and owned by none.”

I thought, Simon, one of the best ways to try to tour your book for our listeners is to do it through individuals whose stories you told quite grippingly. And so I'm going to go through three or four of these individuals and, listeners, you'll see the enormous consequences and revelations that occurred because of these people who were mostly, certainly lost to history the way history is taught in our country. Let's start with Sir Cyril Radcliffe.

**Simon Winchester:** A very sad character from history. He was a civil servant in London who was untraveled. He had never been east to Paris indeed. When in 1947, Lord Louis Mountbatten, who was the viceroy of India, the British potentate high panjandrum who ruled India on behalf of the British crown and who was presiding over the independence of India, which was going to occur on the 15th of August 1947, he summoned Radcliffe across to do one hugely important thing and that was to draw the borders of an entirely new country, which was about to be created.

To back up a moment, Mountbatten fervently hoped that when India became independent of the British crown, it would be one country. And that is what Mahatma Gandhi wanted. And that's

what drove Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first independent prime minister, wanted. But the one person that didn't want it was Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who was the leader of the Muslim League and who said, "No, we do not want Muslims to live in a country ruled by Hindus. We want our own country." And this new country – in fact, there are going to be two parts to it – is going to be called an acronym of Punjab, Afghan, Kashmir, Pakistan. And there'll be West Pakistan and there will be East Pakistan. West Pakistan, to the west of the Punjab and East Pakistan, to the east of Bengali.

"Well," said Mountbatten, "all right. Be that as it may we will have to draw borders." And so he summoned this man, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, to fly across to a country of which he knew nothing, and said, "Draw me a border." And so they supplied him with a house with six assistants – none of whom that turns up wanted to speak to one another, and some out of date maps and some demographic information on the populations of the various villages between which he would have to draw his line. And for six weeks, during which he got severely ill with dysentery, Cyril Radcliffe drew the border with a fountain pen, and he did the same in Bengal as well. But the one that most historians now regard as the more tragic of the two, is the one in the west, the one between the cities of, let's say, Lahore and Amritsar, between Karachi and Bombay. And the line was drawn, and independence was declared, and people in their millions moved in a frenzy across the border. Hindus moving out of Pakistan to the "safety" of India; Muslims moving out of Hindu-dominated India into the "safety" of Pakistan and stirred into this mix were hundreds of thousands of Sikhs as well, killing and on an unbelievable Titanic scale took place. Hundreds of thousands, maybe even millions, of people died as a result of the creation of this 1700-mile long border, and Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who he was entirely blameless in this whole business, slunk home a broken man. He gave his fee, which was modest in any case, back to the Indian government and he burned all his notes. So we'll never know what he truly felt.

And the border exists today and the most heavily guarded, except perhaps for the North [Korea] and South Korean border. Floodlights all the way from the sea, right up to the Himalayas. It can be seen at night from the International Space Station. There's only one gate in it, only one gate, at a place called Wagah. And every night at 6:00 o'clock, the slamming of the gates above this line drawn by Sir Cyril Radcliffe is a ghastly, grotesque episode of theater where the Pakistan and Indian soldiers on either side chosen for their height, and wearing extraordinary cockaded hats and bizarre uniforms, perform some theatrical performance like John Cleese in the *Ministry of Silly Walks* stamping towards each other, coming, quivering mustache to quivering mustache across this line, shake hands briefly, lower the flags, slam the gates. And on each side, crowds – Indians on one side, Pakistanis on the other, urged to shout hatred at each other, because these are countries that have been to war four times over this line, reminding everyone how bizarre this whole episode was of having this man draw a line and create two new countries.

**Ralph Nader:** What a remarkable story. And he spent seven weeks, you say, to draw these lines when he flew in from England. What about Gareth Jones? Tell us about Gareth Jones.

**Simon Winchester:** He was a young Welsh journalist who heard rumors in the early 1930s, 1932, of terrible goings on in the Ukraine. He was fascinated by Russia, fascinated by and appalled by [Joseph] Stalin and had indeed interviewed him on a plane once. And the story was, the publicly disseminated story was that major agricultural reforms were occurring in the

Ukraine to bring enormous amounts of food to the sovietized republic, which with its new cities being built, needed a much more efficient agricultural system. Gareth Jones heard rumors that not all was going well. The world was informed, as it were, officially of what was going on by *the New York Times* reporter in Moscow at the time, a man called [Walter] Duranty. And Duranty said, "Everything's going swimmingly." Stalin's reforms are needed and there may be some hunger possibly, but generally speaking, this redistribution of land in Southern Russia in the Ukraine is going well. He'd never been down south. He had no idea. This young Gareth Jones turned up and found the most appalling tragedy unfolding, because the grain that they were producing in what was the breadbasket of the Soviet Union, the Kansas and Nebraska, was being hoarded and guarded to be sent off to the industrial cities of the north. And the people in the Ukraine were getting no food at all. And they were quite literally starving to death, and it's now reckoned by those people who believe this to have been a genocide. And I think 14 countries believe Stalin's policies were effectively an anti-Ukrainian genocide, that at least 10 million people were deliberately starved to death between 1931 and 1934 by these the collectivization policies of Stalin's Soviet Union. The Kulaks, sort of minor landowning peasantry, were either shipped off to the gulags or shot; all sorts of people were shot on the spot and many, many, as I say, millions died starved to death.

Gareth Jones came back up north. He gave a press conference in Berlin, which was widely reported, not however by Walter Duranty of *the New York Times*, who said, "No, no, no, this is an inconsequential, young rascal of a Welsh journalist, and what he says is simply not true." And for his reporting, Duranty was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. What happened to Gareth Jones was he was effectively followed by Soviet agents and shot and killed in China two years later. There have been attempts ever since to take the Pulitzer Prize back retrospectively from the late Walter Duranty. *The New York Times* has since repudiated the reporting of their correspondent's activities, but the Pulitzer Board has never – even though it's been investigated twice, never seen fit to withdraw the prize. And one of the small hopes I have in this book of mine is that perhaps they'll have a third attempt to think about taking it away.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, the way Stalin's collectivization of the farms in Ukraine was taught in history courses at American universities was not very granular at all. They did teach about the war against the gulags, which were basically middle-income peasants who owned a little land compared to the masses of the poor peasants. We're not talking about huge areas of land, but by comparison and your description, and you went to Ukraine and traced through this, as you did so many other areas in the world that you described. Your description was that it was far, far worse than mere collectivization, that in the early stages, they had Stalin agents who would go into homes, looking for any few pounds of grain to take away from the Kulaks, because all that they grew had to be taken away. They couldn't keep anything to eat. 10 million people were starved to death – children's corpses piled up on the roadway. Why is it that we don't really learn the granular nature of these land seizures on a massive scale when it comes to Ukraine?

**Simon Winchester:** It's extraordinary, isn't it? And yet they do teach it in Canada, for instance, which is one of the countries where it's accepted that what happened was the genocide, and you'll find people in Britain where I come from, who are fairly intimately aware of what went on. Malcolm Muggeridge, who reported on the story for *the Guardian*, the newspaper I used to work for, nobly and heroically reported it in all its tragic details in the 1930s. But most people, most

correspondents based in Moscow, where there was no starvation, and in the case of Walter Duranty, he was extremely well looked after, and he had all the caviar and red Georgian wine that he could possibly consume courtesy of the government. They were bought by skillful propagandists. I mean, that's one of the great stories, is it not, that the Soviet Union, the brilliant and very persuasive propaganda that enabled the state to survive for as long as it did.

No, Gareth Jones was a great hero and there is a not particularly good, but nonetheless worth seeing movie out at the moment called *Mr. Jones*, which tells something of his story. And I would hope that more people get to know about an extraordinarily tragic aspect of land reacquisition forced on the Ukrainian people eighty years ago.

**Ralph Nader:** We're talking with Simon Winchester, author of the new book, *Land*, subtitled *How the Hunger for Ownership Shaped the Modern World*. He is a *New York Times* best-selling author of many books, including the more recent one called *The Perfectionists [How Precision Engineers Created the Modern World]* on precision engineering that certainly shaped a lot of the artifacts of our industrial society. Let's come back to the United States, Simon, and tell the story of John Wesley Powell along with Andrew Jackson and what happened in the Oklahoma land run in the late 19th century, in 1889. There was a short and superficial review, I thought, of your book in *the New York Times*. I just couldn't believe it given how much space they assign to moderately skilled novels. And they sort of chided you for idealizing tribes in what is now known as North America in terms of their civilization. But could you talk about the Trail of Tears [forced relocations of approximately 100,000 Native Americans between 1830 and 1850 by the United States government known as the Indian removal] starting with Andrew Jackson who reversed prior presidential policies?

**Simon Winchester:** Well, indeed, and the fact that Jackson is still on our currency amazes me to this day that he effectively presided over a policy-institute as a policy, which moved so many Native Americans out of their homelands towards what is now – wasn't then, but what is now the state of Oklahoma. I mean, there's an awful lot to unpack in this particular story, but in shorthand, in the Southeastern United States there at the time, in the 1820s, 1830s, being settled at great rate because it was attractive countryside and extremely fertile [with] a lot of the Mississippi [River], Ohio River alluvial plains, ideal for the growing of all manner of plants, not the least of them, of course being cotton, had had been the home of five particularly well populated tribal peoples: the Seminole down in Florida, the Chickasaw, the Cherokee--what we call the Five Civilized Tribes, which is of course a terribly condescending term used by white people. They were civilized, because in the view of white people. Of course, I am one, so I have to take my share of blame. They had organized government; they had organized agriculture. They were in all ways competition for the white settlers that were coming. But nonetheless, as they had not thus far in American history been formally declared to be human beings. I mean, it is an extraordinary fact of American history that it wasn't until 1879 until the case of *Standing Bear v the United States*, that Standing Bear who was a Ponca from current Nebraska, was officially declared to be a human being and thus able to claim civil rights. Up to that point, Native Americans were regarded effectively as squirrels and interesting people, but nonetheless, not humans, which is one of the reasons why going back a bit, the Doctrine of Discovery allowed those people that weren't regarded as human beings to be regarded as non-existent, and consequently, their lands were terra nullius [meaning nobody's land]. They belonged to nobody

so that we could occupy them at will. This happened in Australia, happened in New Zealand, happened in in Canada. But back to the United States, you had these tribes, down in the Southeast, ordered by Jackson and his soldiers carrying out the orders to move them in their entirety--long, forced route marches of men, women, and children with such as they could carry, to unpeopled areas to the west. And that's largely across the Mississippi River into what is now Oklahoma. And so there they gathered, and that's why you got Seminole in Oklahoma, which is weird. I mean, where I live in Massachusetts, all our people, the Mohicans that live in where I live now, live up in Wisconsin. A legacy of another bizarre episode of the forced movement of Native Americans.

Well, the thing about Oklahoma is that it was realized in the late 19th century, although these newly moved Indians were all around Oklahoma, there was a sort of T-shaped part in the middle of about two million acres, which were not occupied by anyone. And they were termed the unassigned territories, and unassigned, they could be given, as it were, by the United States government, who in their belief owned these unassigned lands, to new immigrants, to those people who might wish now to occupy these lands. And so they said on the 22nd of April 1889, that if everyone that would like a piece of this land would kindly line up on a line on the Kansas side of this two million acres and on the Arkansas side on the east of this two million acres, at noon precisely, US cavalry officers would blow bugles and wave flags and people could rush like the devil into these two million acres and leap off their horses or of their Conestoga wagons or whatever, plant flags in land that they thought they would like to have, claim them for themselves, rush off to the US Land Office, [where] there was a tent set up near a place called Guthrie, and pay \$5, the land registration fee, and therefore be the owner of a piece of the United States.

The extraordinary thing about Guthrie is that it's the fastest growing community, I think, to this day in the United States. At 6:00 o'clock on the morning of the 22nd of April 1889, it had a population of zero. 6:00 o'clock that night, population of 15,000 people. They had a north/south street, Division Street, created that night; the next day an east/west street, Oklahoma Street. And then electricity came within five days, the telegraph within seven; the roads were paved in a month. Big buildings were put up within three months and it became briefly the capital of this new territory, Oklahoma territory. But when it became a state, Oklahoma City, 30 miles to the south of it took over, and Guthrie today is a sort of abandoned mausoleum, a reminder of this extraordinary period of land grabbing in the prairies of the Central United States.

**Ralph Nader:** So much for the land of Oklahoma being considered Indian country, their final refuge. A word about John Wesley Powell, before we get into mapping the earth, which is a real fascinating part of this book.

**Simon Winchester:** Well, I've always thought Powell was remarkable for all sorts of reasons. I mean, he had his arm shot off in the Battle of Shiloh, so he had one arm. And yet he was chosen to be the second director of the newly formed US Geological Survey [USGS]. He was a great mapmaker and he was the first white man at least to go down the entirety of what we know now in the Colorado River to be the rapid snow falls that give us the Grand Canyon. So he is, to my mind, in the context of the pushing the frontier of the early United States, a somewhat heroic figure, not least because he did it with three limbs rather than the customary four.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, one thing you mentioned just now, the US Geological Survey, which produced maps, marvelously detailed maps of every acreage in the United States. And on page 95 in your book, you make the remarkable statement, “No American, so far as I’m aware, ever professed a deep and unsullied affection for the US Geological Survey topographical sheets, that it is possible to order from the government agencies. They are fine enough maps, and they covered the entirety of the nation, but seldom are they bought for the sheer pleasure of ownership of the ability to pour over them and imagine or remember to draw contented admiration at their elegant appearance and scrupulous accuracy.” Well, my late brother Shaf [Shafeek Nader] was an exception to what you just said. Because in his 20s, he actually ordered USGS geographical maps of areas in New England. And with his siblings, we would pour over them with great fascination, and they’re still available.

You have a chapter on international borders, and there are about 316 international land borders around the world. And you start your chapter with the longest one of all – 5525 miles between the United States and Canada, which you say, “There is currently no wall or fence, or watchtower built on or along or across the line, except for those movable gates or barriers that have been constructed at the 105 roadways where it is legal to pass through the border and at the ends of the 14 tunnels or bridges where the boundary runs along a river or across a lake.” But you say in other ways it is under surveillance. Well, talk about the Canadian US border for a moment, please.

**Simon Winchester:** Well, to me, it’s utterly fascinating, not least its history. But I mean, for instance, I often quiz people whenever I go to Alaska, and you see this dia straight line going from the Arctic Ocean near Barrow [City of Utqiagvik] down to where it gets all wiggly down near Skagway. And you say, where do you think that treaty that created this north/south division between Alaska and Canada was signed? Well, it was signed in St. Petersburg, because at the time, Alaska belonged to Russia and Canada belonged to Britain. So it was British and Imperial Russian officials who defined the border between what is the United States and in the Yukon in Northern Canada. It’s a straight line, then after the wiggly bit between in Southern Alaska, it’s effectively straight all the way from Vancouver to the Great Lakes and then it starts meandering around the Great Lakes and then ultimately to New England. And it’s very ungeometric, if you like. But the entire way along, there’s what’s called a vista, which is 20 feet of cleared countryside in the middle of which is the actual line marked by huge concrete posts. But there is a duty. The International Boundary Commission base there, starting off of all places these days in North Dakota [that] keeps the boundary clear. It has no jurisdiction over it. The policing is all done by the border force and national security on both sides.

But yes, it’s touted as being the longest undefended border in the world. Well, undefended it may be, but my gosh, it is surveilled. And there is a wonderful illustration of the sophistication of this surveillance comes in one of the oddities. There’s a piece of the United States, because of a mapmaking error, the belief that the Mississippi River rises from the Lake of the Woods in what is now Manitoba. It doesn’t. It rises in Lake Itasca in Minnesota. But when they were drawing the border, they believed it rose in the Lake of the Woods. And because of that, they created an extension of the United States, which subsequently then was cut off by Canadian territories. It’s a little hard to explain without a map. Basically, if you want to go to the only town in this little peninsula, you have to drive far north and west in Minnesota, cross into Manitoba, drive 50 miles

north, then turn right, turn east in other words, and on a gravel road in the middle of absolutely nowhere. And then you come to a hut on the right and an American flag. There's nobody there, but you are obliged to stop, go into the hut with your passport, hold it up to a television screen, dial a number--what actually is one touch, one button and a number. And an officer in Washington, D.C. will scrutinize your passport and give you permission to enter and woe betide you if you don't, because there is so much electronic surveillance all along the road that you subsequently go on. You won't see it. You won't see any of the surveillance that's all along the border, all the way from Vancouver to New Brunswick in Northern Maine. It may be undefended, but it is surveilled like you wouldn't believe, and you cross it without a passport without permission at your peril.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, as millions of people on both sides, know the Canadians have closed the border to non-commercial traffic in an era of COVID-19. I want to have your attention directed, Simon Winchester, to the concentration of land ownership in the US. And you talked about the two biggest private landowners, individuals, John Malone and Ted Turner; and I hear Bill Gates is coming up fast in that. Can you describe the range of acreage that's owned and what is propelling this thirst to acquire more and more acreage by these gentlemen?

**Simon Winchester:** I'm not sure gentleman is quite the word to describe them, but their bragging rights is part of it, at least within the top few. And certainly Ted Turner and John Malone, who are both cable television magnets, are eager to best the other one. And so in the who's number one and who's number two there's jockeying for power and prestige as the months and the years go on. I have to say Ted Turner does a reasonably good job insofar as he's promoting, it's somewhat ironic considering the slaughter of bison in the 1890s by curious white frontier-busting explorers. I mean, the wholesale slaughter of these marvelous animals was one of the myriad tragedies attendant on the Manifest Destiny in the United States. But he's recreating buffalo heads on the lands that he owns in Colorado, Wyoming and Nebraska; John Malone, a little bit less so. He's more interested, I think, in an acquisition for acquisition's sake and has a huge amount of forest land in Maine, particularly. But both of those characters, at least are not restricting the land too terribly to outsiders. There are a couple who have come up lately, and yes, you mentioned Bill Gates is not in this pantheon. I don't think. He is particularly buying farmland now. And Jeff Bezos, of course, is buying land principally to use as the headquarters for his Blue Origin[, LLC] space exploration efforts. That's another story altogether. But these people called the Wilks brothers fascinate me. They're a couple of brothers who come from far Western Texas, and who made an inordinate amount of money with providing chemicals to the fracking industry. And their company was bought out by the Singapore Sovereign Wealth Fund [GIC Private Limited], which paid them well over \$4 billion, \$2 billion each, which landed in their laps about eight, nine years ago. And they, being very keen evangelicals voted enthusiastically for the last American president, went on a shopping spree for land, which they believed God had directed them to buy and exclude others from. And this is the bad thing, I think, about the Wilks brothers.

There's been a general, not totally watertight arrangement, that the west is countryside where people can go. They can walk and they can climb, and they can fish and snowmobile and do all the kind of things that people like to do in the great arena of the Western Rocky Mountains, particularly the foothills on the eastern side of the Rockies. But the Wilks brothers say, "No,



we're buying it." They bought in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Texas, and rigorously applied the rules that I mentioned at the beginning of our conversation about the bundle of rights that you can exclude people, and they do exclude people. And so they've closed off forest roads that everyone had access to. They've put up gates, put up barbed wire, as I mentioned, invented in Nebraska. They've hired armed guards and people find their behavior pretty hostile and unpleasant.

So in the great scheme of things, Turner and Malone, and many of the other very big landowners, may be there for bragging rights, they're not the biggest in the world. The biggest in the world is an Australian woman, Gina Rinehart, who owns 29 million acres, which is the same anchorage as all of England and Wales. But that's another story, that's mainly for exploiting for iron ore and coal and so forth. But in the United States, Turner, Malone and the Wilks brothers are the boogie men, as it were, and of the three, I would have said that the Wilks brothers are the least popular.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, in terms of land ownership, significance for millions of people, your section on Africa is quite fascinating, where you say that 500 million acres of African land currently remains uncultivated. That's about half of the planet's uncultivated land and yet 600 million African people, almost half of the continent's population, exist below the World Bank's recently upgraded \$1.90 a day poverty line. And after apartheid was abolished to post [Nelson] Mandela in South Africa, you state that even as late as 2017, white South Africans who make up 9% of the population own nearly three quarters of private farmland in South Africa. What's being done generally in the continent about this problem?

**Simon Winchester:** It is a problem indeed. And of course, a lot of it redounds to the disfavor and dislike of Britain, that was after all not the only colonial power, but perhaps the largest colonial power in Africa, perhaps not the most vicious. I think anyone who reads about what went on in Congo would know that the Belgians behaved pretty badly, but the legacy of European colonialism, in Africa particularly, is shameful in its longevity. And I think we--when I say that, I mean, we, the British--made up those entirely half-hearted attempt to solve some of the problems we had created by creating funds of money in London, which we said we would hand out to newly independent governments. And I'm thinking particularly of what was some Southern Rhodesia, which became what is now Zimbabwe. We set up a fund such that the rulers of independent Zimbabwe could buy out white farmers and give them money, give them market prices for their farms. And that money would be supplied by the British government.

But unfortunately, that scheme came to a shuddering halt when there was some misappropriation of the money. And at the same time, a lot of the transfers between black farmers and white farmers was enforced, and the white farmers simply had their land taken away, expropriated, which of course, one might say from a historical perspective was justified because the whites had done precisely the same thing a century or so before. It's an unhappy story. In some more liberally minded places, Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, where the French have got a better handle on things than the British ever did, transfers have gone relatively well. But the figures still suggest otherwise that a small fraction of white populations still own an untenably large amount of African farmland and hungry Africans are everywhere. Whether it's going to land reform that is obviously necessary is going to happen in the short-term, I doubt in the long-term; it simply has to, but it's not a pretty situation.

**Ralph Nader:** Another chapter you write is on the conflict of land between the Palestinians and Israelis. The Israelis of course had the kibbutz communal land tradition that they brought to Palestine. And then there was the tribal lands of the Arabs. And you go into this in considerable detail starting with the Balfour Declaration. Is there any way you could just summarize this before I ask you some concluding questions? We're talking to Simon Winchester, author of the book that just came out in mid-January, *Land: How the Hunger For Ownership Shaped the Modern World*. And that's certainly appropriate to the present situation in Palestine and Israel.

**Simon Winchester:** If ever there was a classic exemplar of the problems thrown up by partition, Ireland is classic point, India, Pakistan, and other, are no better than the divisions that have been forced on the people of the Holy Lands, the Levant in the wake of the Balfour Declaration of 1917. It's one of those situations where I had to try and tell the story with a straight bat – cricketing metaphor, I know. But I had to be as fair as I possibly could. I mean, whose land is it? Then you have to look into the history of how the Jewish people coming up through this passageway, because effectively a Palestine is a passageway between the sea and the mountains and the river and the Jordan. Those that settled their traditions and the Palestinians that already lived there, what were their traditions? And one had to try as best as one could to, to say, what is fair and who has rights.

And I have this small amount of skin in the game in that my father, my late father was a soldier, a young lieutenant or captain, I think lieutenant, assigned to Palestine. So it was part of the policing of the situation. Remembering that the Balfour Declaration had insisted that where the Balfour Declaration, for those that don't remember it, said that the British government would look kindly upon the establishment of a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine, but said that were a state ever to be created, then the rights of the Palestinians, whose land this ultimately was, should be respected. Well, in my view, it has not been respected. The Palestinians have been treated in many ways shamefully. And I'm sure if this is heard, I will get a lot of unpleasant mail from various organizations that think that this is nonsense. But this conflict over land, as with the conflict in Ireland, as with the conflict in India, is going to persist for a very long time, because land does not look kindly to partitioning artificially borders invariably created by mountain chains or big rivers, but where humankind decides, this is where my people live, and this is where your people live and never the twain shall meet, often ends in rancor and worse; in Palestine, you could find no better example of it.

**Ralph Nader:** Simon, when this book came out, what kind of reaction did you get? Because you do devote some pages to the expanding Land Trust Movement in America, especially focusing on a 400-acre area in Western Massachusetts where you live. And what kind of reaction did you get to this? I mean, it's not only a book to be of interest to lawyers and real estate people; this is a book for the ages in terms of understanding how we establish some sort of justice and order and predictability, and foreseeability on our planet earth. What kind of reaction? Were you surprised by it in one way or another?

**Simon Winchester:** Well, to be perfectly honest with you, Ralph, very pleased. I mean, the reaction, all the reviews thus far have been positive. The one in *the New York Times* was slightly dismissive, but at the same time, *the New York Times Review of Books* editor had me on her podcast and that was an extremely positive interview and it all went very well. No one has been

outwardly hostile, I don't think. And indeed, the idea when we talk about Henry George and the land value tax and the dispersal of ownership among land trusts by the state run in Massachusetts or county run in Berkshire County, where I live in Western Massachusetts now, is generally thought of as being an interesting idea.

So, [regarding the] idea of respecting the rights of Native Americans as the Maori, as the Aborigines, as the First Nation people in Canada--the appointment, if she's confirmed, of Deb Haaland, seems to be symbolically hugely important. If a Native American from a Pueblo Tribe in Southwestern United States becomes the new Secretary of the Interior, I mean, forget all this stuff about coal and mining and so forth; the fact that a Native American gets to be in charge of the Interior Department, which looks after Native American lands, seems to me, hugely important. All these things mixed together suggest to me that America is beginning to learn whether the laws of trespass will ever be ameliorated, whether people will stop demanding more and more land and putting in more and more behind fences, I don't know and I somewhat doubt. But things are beginning to shift and shifting, I think, in possibly the right direction.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, this book is really so beautifully written, I could scarcely read more than five times your description of Yosemite, which was inhabited by the Miwok Indian Tribe and then they were largely driven out except for tourist purposes by white men. But you sort of put your pen to paper as the white man who entered this magnificent area. I spent a summer working in Yosemite after I graduated from the university. And I woke up once on the porch of Ansel Adams, who allowed us to sleep there overnight on the first night in Yosemite, and I looked out and it was so breathtaking [to see] El Capitan. It was so breathtaking that to this day, it's the most beautiful place I've ever seen on earth. And you really did a wonderfully descriptive passage on that, Simon.

What's your next book? If you will permit a suggestion, you could do a great book on the two private pillars of law in our country, the law of torts and the law of contracts, inherited from your ancestral land, England medieval time. It has such human interest and the lawyers have never done justice to its expansive intricacies and how it affected our societies and spread around the world. But what are you expecting to write next?

**Simon Winchester:** Well, although I think that is an extremely tempting idea, tort and contract law. I'm actually writing a book; its working title, that may not be the end title, is *Knowing what we know: A History of the Diffusion of Knowledge and the Risk to the Future of Wisdom*. So I'm looking at how knowledge is how things are taught [and] how knowledge is accumulated and stored. So schools and newspapers and encyclopedias and the internet, of course, and the thought that if knowledge is now so readily available, just at the touch of a button, we no longer store it in our heads because there's no need to. If you accept the rather facile idea that wisdom is knowledge multiplied by experience, well, older people with a lot of experience but with no knowledge will perhaps not be in possession of the wisdom that society needs. So as soon as I can travel again, which I'm beginning to be fairly optimistic about, I'll go off and look at schools, and I'll talk as I was this morning about the longest encyclopedia in the world, for instance, the Siku Quanshu in China. Nine and a half thousand volumes assembled in 1790 [began being assembled in 1773 and was completed in 1782] Biggest encyclopedia ever created. And yet no mention in it of Socrates or [Sir Isaac] Newton or Galileo [Galilei] or [William] Shakespeare.

Knowledge conveyed in different parts of the world given different values. So that's effectively what I'll be doing for the next two or three years.

**Ralph Nader:** How fundamental indeed; how fundamental. The aphorisms of different cultures have always fascinated me. Marcus Cicero, the ancient Roman lawyer, once defined freedom as “participation in power”. And on the other side of the world, a philosopher in the Ming Dynasty in 14<sup>th</sup>-century China once said, “To know and not to do is not to know.” And in the internet age, where bits of information rarely achieve the status of knowledge and even less rarely achieve the status of judgment to wisdom, it's very important for a book that you're contemplating to be written. And I thank you for that, Simon. Before we close, I always like to give Steve and David an opportunity to pitch in and make a comment or ask a question.

**Steve Skrovan:** Yeah. Simon, before you go, I'd just like to ask a more general question. What's the moral of your story about land, and is there any way humans need to change our mindset about how we regard land ownership?

**Simon Winchester:** I do think that the Aboriginal belief--you may think it rather trite and perhaps tree-hugging of me to mention it--but the Aboriginals in Australia have always believed the earth is our mother. We don't own her; [if] we take care of her [and] nurture her, she will look after us. And I think that belief, however corny some may think it to be, should pervade all our entire attitude towards the land beneath our feet.

**Ralph Nader:** David?

**David Feldman:** Yeah. I have a question. People often ask what is the end game for capitalism? What's next? Well, Bill Gates is now America's largest owner of farmland. More and more homes are getting bought up by private equity. Is it possible that the next step for capitalism is a step backwards, not forwards, back to feudalism?

**Simon Winchester:** It's a wonderful question. And I think in a way, although this wasn't my intention, when I wrote the book, was to fire a warning shot, if you'd like, to say, if we didn't bring about some kind of equality in land ownership, some spreading of the wealth, the wealth that is the land, then we're going to run into severe problems. I mean, social problems, not being the least of them. I mean, leaving aside environmental problems and food production problems and so on and so forth. But I think I take heart from the fact that other countries, more advanced socially than ourselves, and I look at the Scandinavians. I'm beginning to look at the Australians. But above all, the model country, New Zealand. Not only, of course, in this matter, but in the whole matter of dealing with threats, among other things, with the COVID pandemic, they are grappling with their land problem. Remember that in 1840, when the Treaty of Waitangi was signed and all of New Zealand's land passed into the hands of Queen Victoria, slowly the Maori people are getting it back. Not as fast as they'd like, but they are getting it back. After that, I believe people in Australia, hundreds of more complex tribes, will start getting access to their land more generally. Will it ever spread to this country? I think it has to. Otherwise there'll be social and economic and environmental disorder. It has to change.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, on that point, you know, it's quite interesting that when the tribes in Alaska achieved recognition, Washington politicians made sure that the land was owned by a tribal corporation rather than the traditional tribal common ownership. And lo and behold, the commercial DNA of these tribal corporations began to work themselves out in very familiar ways. And so the struggle continues, and you've certainly contributed an enormous amount of enlightenment to our understanding here. I'm going to certainly notify 205 law school deans that they should have this as reading in the accessibly narrow definition of property law at our law schools. So thank you very, very much for this. We've been talking with Simon Winchester, author of the book *Land*, subtitle is *How the Hunger For Ownership Shaped the Modern World* by Harper Collins Publisher. And I hope that it continues to be read by more and more people.

And please listeners, this is a really great gift to your local library. Libraries are suffering from budget restrictions. You want to make a contribution to the community? Give it to the library. Some of them actually have discussions about books for book clubs all over America and there are tens of thousands of them. Drop your stricture that you only talk about fiction books and pick up this book by Simon Winchester on land through the ages, through the cultures, through the geography, through the anthropology in our history. Thank you, Simon.

**Simon Winchester:** Steve, David and Ralph, all of you, thank you very much.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Simon Winchester. We will link his work at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). Up next: Big oil, gaming the system? Well, I never. We'll get to that after we check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

**Russell Mokhiber:** From the National Press Building in Washington D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter*, "Morning Minute" for Friday, March 12th, 2021; I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Legislation was introduced in the [US] House [of Representatives] and [US] Senate earlier this week to strengthen safety measures to prevent deadly underride accidents involving tractor-trailers and straight trucks. The bipartisan Stop Underrides Act would require underride guards on the sides and front of all new trucks and update outdated standards for underride guards on the rear of trucks. An underride crash occurs when a car slides under a large truck, such as a semi-trailer, during an accident. When these accidents happen, a car's safety features are rendered useless because most of the car slides under the trailer and the trailer undercarriage crashes straight through the windows and into the passengers. The passengers in the car often suffer severe head and neck injuries, including decapitation. These accidents are often fatal, even at low speeds. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

**Steve Skrovan:** Thank you, Russel. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. I want to thank our guest again, Simon Winchester. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you, podcasts listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up." A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

**David Feldman:** Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* YouTube channel. And for Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to [nader.org](http://nader.org). For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to [corporatecrimereporter.com](http://corporatecrimereporter.com).

**Steve Skrovan:** And Ralph has provided two separate form letters to send to your representatives demanding they take action on corporate crime and taxing the rich. Just click on the clearly marked boxes on the right-hand corner of the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* website and it's all laid out there for you to fill in and personalize any way you want. Go to [ralphnaderhour.com](http://ralphnaderhour.com) and take action.

**David Feldman:** And to support The American Museum of Tort Law, check out their online shop at [store.tortmuseum.org](http://store.tortmuseum.org). They have autographed books, "Flaming Pinto" coffee mugs, and other unique gifts for all you, lawyers, law students, paralegals and tort fans out there. The producers of the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

**Steve Skrovan:** Our theme music *Stand Up, Rise Up* was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman.

**David Feldman:** Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* when we'll be joined by Steven Donziger, a man who took on Chevron and is now a corporate political prisoner. Thank you, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you, everybody. And as Steve said, those letters are designed to make you have a bigger impact on Congress. They can't fluff those letters off. They're too detailed. So go with the corporate crime letter to get corporate crime hearings and federal corporate crime reform.

[57:52]

[Audio Ends]