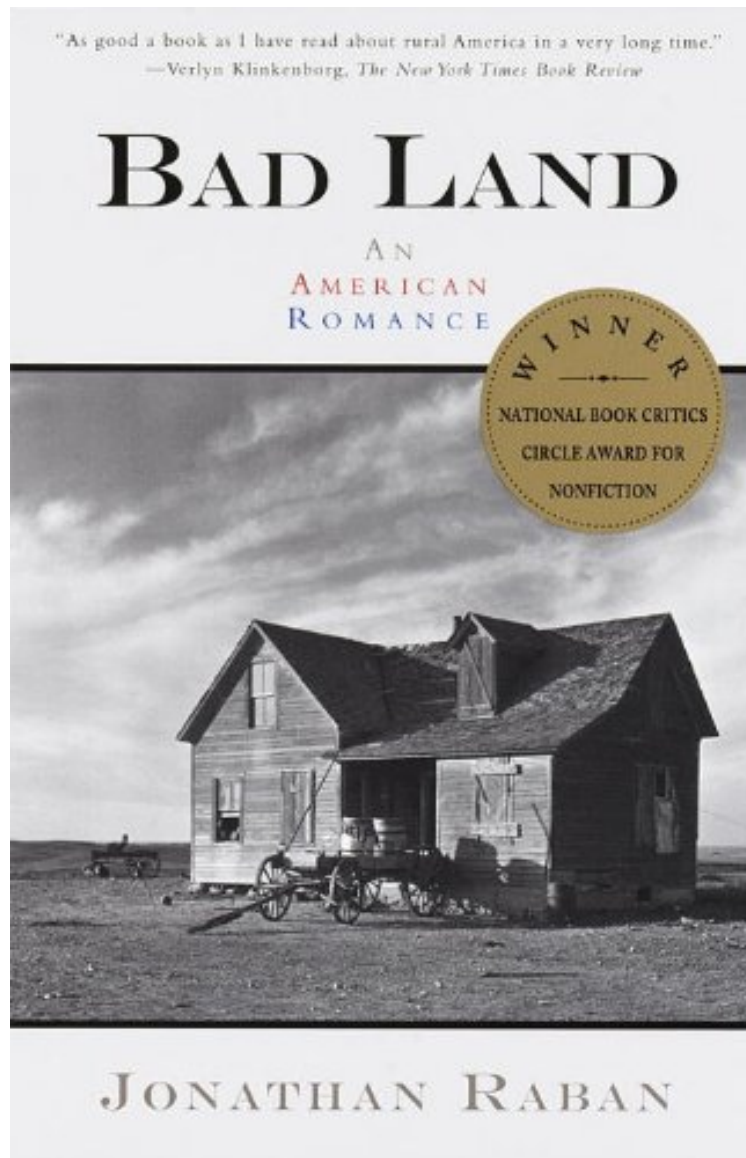


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## Bad Land: An American Romance (Vintage Departures)

Von Jonathan Raban

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**Von Jonathan Raban : Bad Land: An American Romance (Vintage Departures)** before purchasing it in order to  
gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bad Land: An American Romance (Vintage  
Departures):

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen1 von 1 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Missed  
the Bigger storyVon Michael SolRaban does not comment on the collapse of commodity prices after 1917, which is

really what crushed these homesteaders. Further, the Milwaukee Road did not mislead anyone, as Raban seems to suggest, the land was, for a generation, lush; Montana produced nearly twice as much wheat per acre as Iowa, for instance, and it was considered a higher quality. This productivity lasted from the Milwaukee's entry in 1905 through 1917. But, even if there had not been a drought beginning in 1917, the crisis would have happened when wheat prices dropped from over \$2 a bushel to less than a \$1.00, even as low as 63 cents, during a period of 100% inflation in farming expenses. Abundant rain would not have changed what happened to the Honyockers in Eastern Montana, and Raban, unfairly, did not point this important fact out. The collapse in commodity prices crushed the farmers more surely than anything else. Raban fails to note that during wet years that followed, in the early 20's, the banks kept right on failing, the remaining homesteaders continued to give up. All regions of American agriculture have had wet years followed by dry; the statistical record does not suggest that it was particularly unusual that agriculture, anywhere, would be affected by lack of rain; although Raban seems surprised, and blames the Milwaukee Railroad for this event. The more compelling factor, that he missed in *Bad Land* was the unusual and dramatic collapse of commodity prices at the same time, and the fact that the prices did not recover for another quarter century. Raban tells an interesting story, and tells it well, but misread what actually was happening. And he didn't understand that transcontinental railroads, such as the Milwaukee, were looking for long haul freight. Hauling bulky, low value commodities was not the reason it built through eastern Montana. Good land, bad land, the Milwaukee built to Butte, Montana and to the North Pacific Coast to get long haul, high tariff traffic. Overall: good writing, interesting story; bad research, bad premise.

0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. A land where humans tried to advance and are in retreat

Von Ein Kunde Raban writes about Montana, and the settlers who came happy but soon left, destitute and disillusioned at the harsh conditions. His comments can apply to the north of the state I live in (South Australia): the mountains and rangelands of the Flinders Ranges. This country was settled in the second half of the last century, on the hope of farming grain and sheep. There were a few years of plenty, then drought forced humans to re-think and retreat. Today the area is renowned for its natural beauty, but has the feel of an empty landscape, and the visitor wonders why. Plenty of local books describe the Flinders today, but it was not until I had read "*Bad Land*" that I had some understanding of the hopes of settlers, the intense persuasion to go, the reality, and why they decided to leave. Why is "*Bad Land*" an important book? Much is written about progress, and to-day people think that anything can be done. It is good to be reminded occasionally that there are places where enthusiasm, hard work, the latest technology, abundant finance, and even large amounts of land are not enough to make a go of it, and that humans are still for all their ideas about themselves subject to the forces of the natural world. The book reminds me of "*Into thin air*", which described a disastrous expedition to climb MtEverest, with many climbers killed by a storm near the summit. The mountaineers placed hope and faith in their technology and experience, but forgot or were blind to their own frailty. It is interesting that the two books both came out at around the same time.

0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. One reason no one likes JP Hill

Von Ein Kunde Raban's such a good writer, I suppose I'd like any book he wrote (I'm going to find out shortly by getting hold of another). And that is the only reason I liked this book since the subject matter -- settlement of the Northern Plains around 1911 - 1920 -- does not, in itself, compel me. But then again, I didn't know much about it, and Raban very nicely introduced us. So many interesting things . . . how the drawing of the North Dakota / Montana state line around the 104th meridian split these otherwise similarly-sited people and diluted their political power; how the initial "wet years" of 1911 - 1914 gave such false hope, leading to such disillusionment, and eventually further emmigration west, as the "dry years" ensued and blew away their topsoil with their dreams; how they didn't wander into the area, but rather, were seduced into it by the railroads' (read JP Hill's) misrepresentation of the climate and land, the ease of "firming up" one's rather large homestead claim (hundreds of acres for a song), and the new "scientific" method of "dry farming" which promised to re-create the arcadia these settlers remembered from Europe. And I never thought much about hard it would be to build miles of barbed-wire-and-wood-post fences in a land without trees. Raban argues that this suckering of the little people by the railroads/federal government accounts for the fierce anti-federalism of the seemingly-many up in that area today; that the memory has passed through the generations. So many other memories and ways of life have perservered there on the ranches and such, he may be right. As to Paul Theroux, Raban says they have been friends for "decades." Raban's writing here is similar to Theroux's in the ironic and honest observations that help propel the narrative. But Raban never says anything like, "I felt like throwing the little old lady off the train."

Kurzbeschreibung Seduced by the government's offer of 320 acres per homesteader, Americans and Europeans rushed to Montana and the Dakotas to fulfill their own American dream in the first decade of this century. Raban's stunning evocation of the harrowing, desperate reality behind the homesteader's dream strips away the myth--while preserving the romance--that has shrouded our understanding of our own heartland. From the Hardcover edition.

deJonathan Raban ambles and picks his way across the Montana prairie, called "*The Great American Desert*" until Congress offered 320-acre tracts of barren land to immigrants with stardust in their eyes. Raban's prose makes love to the waves

of land, red dirt roads, and skeletons of homesteads that couldn't survive the Dirty Thirties. As poignant as any romance novel, there's heartbreak in the failed dreams of the homesteaders, a pang of destiny in the arbitrary way railroad towns were thrown into existence, and inspiration in the heroism of people who've fashioned lives for themselves by cobbling together homes from the ruined houses of those who couldn't make it. Through it all, Raban's voice examines and honors the vast open expanses of land and pays homage to the histories of families who eked out an existence..comPart history, part modern-day travelogue, *Bad Land* attempts to locate the dry plains of eastern Montana and the Dakotas in the American imagination. Jonathan Raban (author of the best-selling *Old Glory*) explores deserted homesteads and listens to the persevering descendants of the rugged pioneers who settled this territory. Toward the end of his eclectic book, Raban tries to explain why a place like this would appeal to people like Ted Kaczynski, a.k.a. the Unabomber. The best passages recall Paul Theroux in top form.