



# **Transportation and Revolt: Pigeons, Mules, Canals, and the Vanishing Geographies of Subversive Mobility (MIT Press)**

*Jacob Shell*

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During World War I, German soldiers shot down carrier pigeons for fear the birds were carrying enemy communiqués; in Mexico, the United States, and other countries, mules were used for smuggling and secret travel in mountainous areas; in the British Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the British feared that supplies for anti-imperialist rebellion were being transported by canal. In this book, Jacob Shell argues that many political regimes have historically associated certain modes of transportation with revolt or with subversive activities -- and have responded by acting to destroy or curtail those modes of transportation. Constructing a conceptual framework linking physical geography with the politics of mobility, Shell presents historical examples of the secret, subversive mobilization of people and cargo across watery spaces and harsh terrain, carried by watercraft and transport animals including pigeons, mules, camels, elephants, and sled dogs. Efforts to suppress such clandestine mobilities ranged from the violent (the shooting of pigeons) to the indirect -- curtailing financial support, certain kinds of social knowledge, or schemes for infrastructural development. To show how such efforts at immobilization could affect cities and urban transportation, Shell looks at the Port of New York in the early twentieth century, where potentially transformative plans for inner-city freight transportation were rejected -- likely, Shell argues, due to fears of anarchist activities. The innovative argument advanced by Shell in *Transportation and Revolt* challenges conventional wisdom about the supposed obsolescence of transport methods that have become marginalized in the modern era.

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