



Silent Theft: The Private Plunder of Our Common Wealth

David Bollier

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'They hang the man and flog the woman That steal the goose from off the common, But let the greater villain loose That steals the common from the goose.' - Traditional nursery rhyme

Until a 1998 federal court decision, a Minnesota publisher claimed to own every federal court decision, including *Roe v. Wade* and *Brown v. Board of Education*. A Texas company was recently allowed to claim a patent on basmati rice, a kind of rice grown in India for hundreds of years. The Mining Act of 1872 is still in effect, allowing companies to buy land from the government at USD5 and acre if they plan to mine it. These are resources that belong to all of us, yet they are being given away to companies with anything but the common interest in mind. Where was the public outcry, or the government intervention, when these were happening? The answers are alarming. Private corporations are consuming the resources that the American people collectively own at a staggering rate, and the government is not protecting the commons on our behalf. In *Silent Theft*, David Bollier exposes the audacious attempts of companies to appropriate medical breakthroughs, public airwaves, outer space, state research, and even the DNA of plants and animals. Amazingly, these abuses often go unnoticed, Bollier argues, because we have lost our ability to see the commons. Publicly funded technological innovations create common wealth (cell phone airwaves, internet addresses, gene sequences) at blinding speed, while an economic atmosphere of deregulation and privatization ensures they will be quickly bought and sold. In an age of market triumphalism, does the notion of the commons have any practical meaning? Crisp and revelatory, *Silent Theft* is a bold attempt to develop a new language of the commons, a new ethos of commonwealth in the face of a market ethic that knows no bounds.

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