# Twitter Thread by Mitch Chapman



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**https://t.co/LXMj1pRHP8:**

**"The epitaph of the United States may be that the idea of the rugged individualist was a lie, there never were any, and in the age of air travel and medicine we're all very connected, our well-being depends on other people's well-being."**

@davewiner John Wesley Powell tried to expose the lie in the late 1870s. Wallace Stegner wrote about it, at length, in "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian". Recommended.

"...individual initiative and individual labor and individual capital were inadequate to develop the irrigation works needed on an arid-belt farm unless the farm were located high on the headwaters of a small stream..."

"The inflexible fact of aridity lay like a fence along the 100th meridian. From approximately that line on, more than individual initiative was needed to break the wilderness."

"Powell's way was a way tested by New England barn raisings and corn huskings ... tested even more fully by the Mormon experience of thirty years and the New Mexican experience of ten generations."

Quoting John Wesley Powell from 1885:
"By the division of labor men have become interdependent, so that every man works for some other man... But during all my life I have worked for other men, and thus I am every man's servant;"

"so are we all — servants to many masters and master of many servants... Thus the enmity of man to man is appeased, and men live and labor for one another; individualism is transmuted into socialism, ..."

The first time this passage made any impression on me, it was because of its use of "socialism". I'd only ever seen "socialism" used as another word for Soviet-style "communism".

But here it was, free of cold-war trappings, being contrasted with (rugged) individualism. It was striking to see this in a book about the American West, copyrighted in McCarthy-era 1953.