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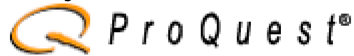

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artificialization and its discontents

Michael Bess. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 31-33 (3 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Bess presents five main themes that environmental history could fruitfully explore in the coming decades--all five predicated on a single observation. Among other things, he cites that environmental historians can play a vital role in helping humankind to understand the gale-force of artifice that mankind have unleashed on our planet and on ourselves.

Full Text (1105 words)

Copyright Environmental History Jan 2005

I SEE FIVE main themes that environmental history could fruitfully explore in the coming decades-all five predicated on a single observation. The world around us, including our own bodies, is coming to be increasingly permeated by potent technologies of all shapes and sizes; this process of artificialization has been accelerating since the 1700s, and the rate of acceleration has itself increased dramatically since 1945. The changes now come with truly dizzying speed, and they feed on themselves, each innovation further ratcheting up the potential for still other innovations, in a spiral of technological proliferation that calls to mind the story of the sorcerer's apprentice. Over the next fifty years, this open-ended transformative process stands a good chance of turning our physical world, our society, our very identity upside down. Environmental historians can play a vital role in helping

humankind to understand the gale-force of artifice that we have unleashed on our planet and on ourselves.

The first theme I envision has to do with survival. Thus far the social and economic changes wrought by environmentalism have made a significant dent in the world's environmental crisis: We sell ourselves short, and needlessly demoralize ourselves, if we fail to recognize that industrial civilization has come a long way indeed from the belching smokestacks and smoldering open dumps of the 19603. But we remain far-terrifyingly far-from achieving true sustainability. One key priority for our field therefore lies in continuing the ongoing effort to comprehend how societies are mobilized for environmentally friendly transformation. What might "sustainability" actually look like, in concrete practice? How do mentalities change? Where are the best points of leverage for bringing about political and institutional reform?

A second theme, related to this latter one, has to do with the shifting meaning of the words "wild" and "wilderness" on an ever-shrinking planet. Environmentalists sharply criticized Bill McKibben in the 1990s for his dramatic declaration of an "end of nature," citing McKibben's excessively rigid and dualistic framing of the relation between the wild and the tame. But McKibben did have a point. What exactly are we trying to preserve, when we fence off a wilderness area? What value do we find there? And most importantly, in our increasingly artificialized world, can we discover ways to recognize the presence of that value in other places that do not fit the traditional imagery of "pristine wilderness"? Can environmental historians help to chart a path into a new set of values, in which we cherish and defend the wide range of natural-artificial hybrids that increasingly constitute our world? I am thinking of the startled pleasure I experienced when I read in William Cronon's edited volume Uncommon Ground about the Rocky Mountain Arsenal-a flourishing wildlife refuge on atoxic waste dump, "the nation's most ironic nature park." Cronon's book is taking us in the right direction, I believe: toward a reorientation and re-valuation of the relation between the wild and the tame. There is still much work to be done in this regardand the stakes are high, for we can only defend our environment with conviction if we understand clearly what it is that we value in it, and why.

My third theme, in turn, spins off the last one: It has to do with outer space. Even if we optimistically assume that human civilization can achieve true sustainability over the coming century-a big assumption-I have come to the conclusion that our proliferating technologies will inexorably render the planet ever-smaller, ever-tamer. I have tried and tried to convince myself otherwise, but I have invariably concluded (after much agonizing) that all the realistic scenarios for a green future will still, unavoidably, turn the earth into a giant garden, tended by humans wielding tremendously powerful technologies. If this is the case, then outer space beckons as the next wilderness frontier-a natural place that is vast, primeval, untouched, mysterious, and as yet relatively undiscovered. The only problem, of course, is that outer space is not very green: It is mostly black and empty and cold, punctuated by (very) occasional spots of weird and extreme phenomena like nebulae and blackholes. The environmentalists (and environmental historians) of the not-too-distant future will therefore face some intriguing questions: Can we find natural value in a "territory" that is so alien from that of our familiar earth? Will outer space someday come to function in human culture in a way that parallels the contemporary meanings of earthly wilderness?

My fourth theme concerns the changing "nature" of human bodies themselves. At what point would a human, intensively modified by medical or genetic technologies, become so artificial that he or she is considered to occupy a qualitatively different category of personhood from other (non-modified) humans? This used to be a topic for science fiction writers: I believe it increasingly will constitute a hot topic for philosophers, biologists, technologists -and environmental historians as well. We are interested, after all, in nature, and our bodies are very much a part of the natural realm-part of the world whose shape is changing under the growing pressure of technological advance.

A final area of interest (and concern) is nanotechnology. This field, situated somewhere between physics, engineering, and cybernetics, may or may not fulfill the hopes of its contemporary proponents. The technologies are still so young that it is hard to tell the prognostication from the hype. But if only a fraction of the things that are being said of nanotechnology come true, our physical world will not be the same again. Got a problem with an oil spill, for example? Simply walk over and pour a vial of self-

replicating petroleum-chomping microbots onto the waves, then sit back and watch those little suckahs go. The oil disappears, like water off a desert floor. Such technologies would truly take the human relationship with the physical world to an entirely new level-and the dangers would of course be commensurate with the powers unleashed. (What if the teeming petroleum-chompers unexpectedly develop a taste for algae, or plankton, and the failsafe that's supposed to stop them malfunctions?) Environmentalists and environmental historians would do well to keep a close eye on this field as it develops.

Enlarge 200%
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The American Sponge Industry in Key West and Chicago, 1892.

[Author Affiliation]
Michael Bess is associate professor of history at Vanderbilt University. He recently published The Light-Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France, 1960-2000 (University of Chicago Press, 2003), which won the 2003 George Perkins Marsh prize of ASEH and an honorable mention from the Pinkney Prize committee of the Society for French Historical Studies. He is writing a book entitled Artificial Persons: Shifting Boundaries of the Human in the Age of Robots and Clones.

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beyond colonialism

Tamara Giles-Vernick. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 34-36 (3 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

African environmental history, like the broader field of environmental history, has long drawn inspiration from interdisciplinarity. This interdisciplinarity has allowed mankind to pose new questions and to seek new insights into the continent's changing people-environment relations. Here, Giles-Vernick argues that debates about degradation, urbanization, resource consumption, and health in Africa have implications for the broader field of environmental history.

Full Text (1098 words)

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AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTAL history, like the broader field of environmental history, has long drawn inspiration from interdisciplinarity. This interdisciplinarity has allowed us to pose new questions and to seek new insights into the continent's changing people-environment relations. At the same time, one defining feature of recent African environmental histories, in distinction to the broader field, has been a focus on environmental interventions under colonialism. Specifically, environmental historians have persistently investigated the environmental effects of the colonial conquest; the disenfranchisement of Africans by various colonial schemes to extract, conserve, and even restore Africa's natural resources; and Africans' efforts to negotiate and reshape these colonial environmental interventions. While these works have illuminated much, it seems to me that this obsession with colonialism has its limits. Indeed, expanding African environmental history's analytical and interdisciplinary scope might well enable us to generate new questions-and insights-into contemporary debates about "degradation," urbanization, resource consumption, and health in Africa. I'd like to see historians in this field take a much broader view of Africa's changing people-environment relations, to put colonialism into broader temporal, geographical, processual perspectives, and to explore Africa's contemporary environmental concerns in a wider context. I imagine that this broader analysis would draw from environmental history's tradition of interdisciplinarity, and that it could manifest itself in a range of ways. While I frame my comments specifically in terms of African environmental history, I will argue that these suggestions have implications for the broader field of environmental history.

In the first place, this expanded perspective would entail a much longer-term analysis of environmental change in Africa. Because of the dearth of written documents to shed light on the distant past, Africanists will have to draw from new interdisciplinary work on environmental change, particularly that of paleoclimatologists, geologists, and paleoecologists who seek to reconstruct longterm changes in Africa's climate and the effects on African landscapes and people. Indeed, a group of paleoclimatologists and ecologists currently is conducting research on long-term climatic shifts in the Great Lakes region of East Africa, and historian David Schoenbrun drew from such early investigations in his book, A Green Place, A Good Place.' Just as historians like Schoenbrun have helped to historicize better the long-term climatic and ecological studies, these studies also can illuminate more recent histories of environmental interventions (including those of colonial rule) in new ways. Current debates, for instance, about the uniqueness of contemporary resource use, deforestation, and "degradation" might be sharpened if we understood better how contemporary environmental exploitation fits into a much longer history of climate change, resource use, and ecological change.

A broader understanding of Africa's environmental change might also incorporate processes that have transformed people and their environments throughout the world. African environmental history has long focused almost exclusively on rural environments and the people who inhabit them, but like other parts of the globe, Africa also has a long history of economic specialization, accumulation, and urbanization. Cities like Jenne-Jenno, Gao, Great Zimbabwe, and Aksum all owed their growth to these processes. For environmental historians, historical studies of urbanization, economic specialization, and accumulation could shed light on the environmental consequences of these processes.2 (Historians have debated, for instance, whether urban growth depleted available resources in Great Zimbabwe and Aksum, thus contributing to their decline.) Historical studies also could provide insights into the current development of mega-cities like Lagos, and the interrelations of urban and rural environments and peoples. Finally, these studies might also illuminate a contemporary history of consumerism and its relationship with environmental change. A colleague recently described to me the heated debates about polythene bags (buveera) in Kampala (Uganda), where the city's expanding population uses the plastic bags to package consumer goods, but then discards or burns them. The dumping or burning of buveera adversely affects soil and air quality, since incinerated bags produce dioxins and other organic pollutants. The fate of the lowly plastic bag in African cities like Kampala thus compels us to consider consumerism, its detritus, and its environmental consequences, not only in Africa but elsewhere in the world.

Investigating the environmental consequences of economic specialization, accumulation, urbanization, and consumerism might lead to new questions for environmental historians to tackle. In Kampala, for instance, how do burning plastic bags affect the health of urban and rural peoples and shape their conceptions of health and illness? Parallel questions influence my current research in West Africa, which explores how urban growth and the introduction of irrigated agriculture affected malaria's ecology and Africans' changing conceptions of health and malaria.3 Indeed, environmental historians may contribute to and derive crucial insights from the history of public health. How people use their environments has profoundly affected diseases like malaria and trypanosomiasis. Falciparum malaria, for instance, emerged as an acute problem in human beings several thousand years ago, probably because human activities helped to facilitate conditions under which the parasite, Plasmodium falciparum, and its most important mosquito vector, Anopheles gambiae, thrived. Clearing forests for food production created ideal sites in which A. gambiae reproduced. Over time, agricultural production increased human population densities, providing a human reservoir in which P. falciparum could sustain itself. Conversely, these diseases have shaped human populations and land use, affecting population densities and influencing how and where people lived, farmed, herded, and traded. A developing dialogue between environmental history and history of public health and medicine thus seems productive. To public-health histories, environmental historians can contribute greater historical depth and more attention to how environmental use shaped disease ecology. In engaging with the history of public health's concerns about changing medical knowledge, developing health-care infrastructures, and the influences of gender, class, race, and ethnicity on access to health care resources, environmental historians can take stock of changing notions of health, illness, and their environmental implications.

[Footnote]
NOTES
1. David Schoenbrun, A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian Change and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15th Century (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1998).
2. Other environmental historians have explored these interconnections productively, including Ted Steinberg, John McNeill, and Paul Sutter.
3. These concerns build on the work of environmental historians who sought to understand sleeping-sickness epidemics in terms of changing ecologies in early twentieth-century Africa. see, for instance, the work of James L. Giblin, John Ford, Kirk Hoppe, and Maryinez Lyons.

[Author Affiliation]
Tamara Giles-Vernick is an associate professor of history and a member of the conservation biology program at the University of Minnesota. She is the author of Cutting the Vines of the Past: Environmental Histories of the Central African Rain Forest (University of Virginia, 2002), as well as several articles on environmental history in Africa and oral historiography.

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environmental history and the category of the natural

Angela Gugliotta. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 37-39 (3 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Gugliotta talks about the political deployment of nature ideologies and their centrality to national identity. Among other things, she believes that environmental history is too focused on environmental damage and activist struggle, not attuned enough to the way historically malleable appeals to nature--to a given cosmological order, to the soil, to what is pure or savage--can be used to shape culture.

Full Text (1070 words)

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I KNOW A historian who has written a wonderful book about the political deployment of nature ideologies and their centrality to national identity. She does not want to be known as an "environmental historian." She imagines, I think, that environmental history is too focused on environmental damage and activist struggle, not attuned enough to the way historically malleable appeals to natureto a given cosmological order, to the soil, to what is pure or savage-can be used to shape culture.

Richard White's call for attention to knowledge of nature through labor, and William Cronon's focus on commodification and alienation, address fundamental questions and have set a research program for a generation. Both presuppose a slippery element-the "unmade"-which can problematically be commodified and from which one can be alienated. They argue against Bill McKibben's view that there is no nature once climate is marked by human influence. The unmade and the made are everywhere mixed, yet Cronon and White agree that unmade elements deserve reverence and protection, and still "in wildness is the preservation of the world."

In contemporary political, moral, and consumer discourse, we are constantly exhorted to choose the natural, or we are absolved from the consequences of choices already made by interpreting them as having been dictated by nature. Historians should easily recognize the cultural contingency of such appeals. What is "natural" or "unnatural" about agriculture, air travel, kingship, petroleum, AIDS, the family wage, nectarines, asbestos, monogamy, rape, low infant mortality, or eight-decade life spans? Yet, because the slippery category of the natural has long been central to human self-understanding, we also should try to uncover what is commensurable among changing concepts. Perhaps the best candidate for a timeless standard of the natural is Rachel Carson's, which compares the pace of biological and cultural evolution. That which is older on an evolutionary time-scale, to which everything around it has had a better chance to adapt, is the more natural. Apply Carson's approach to the list above: It raises many difficult questions.

Normative appeal to the natural is not an invariant historical pattern, but when it is absent, it is often replaced by its opposite, as in preferences for the civilized, the spiritual, or the ideal over the savage, the fleshly, or the material. Mary Douglas says that in choosing what to call pollution, we choose our form of life. In choosing how to understand the given order of the world, and whether to take it as normative, or to construct our norms in opposition to it, we determine the most fundamental parameters of culture. The moral and political role of the natural and related categories in the human past is enormous. We should more assiduously explore their history.

I am not advocating that environmental history become a history of ideas. An exclusive focus on elites and the literate and a preference for the intellectual over the material would betray the discipline's roots in "history from the bottom up" and in bringing the material environment "back in" to history. David Hackett Fischer has outlined the dangers of "tunnel history" in which historians carve the past into a series of parallel tunnels in which only ideas cause ideas and in which population and prices cannot interact with religious enthusiasm. Normative uses of nature and of its opposites can be embedded in non-elite and non-literate sources-in cave paintings, in trading patterns and limitations on the kinds of things that can be exchanged for one another, in religious ritual and myth, in labor discourse, and in reproductive practice. Often, when historians examine practices that do not seem

centrally to concern normative conceptions of nature, they import such conceptions from their own time. This is not illegitimate, but it would be better done with more explicit attention to what is being imported and to actors' views (perhaps implicit) of the same matters.

The category of the natural has longstanding historical connections that hold the power to liberate environmental history from the problem alluded to at the beginning of this essay-that of having an agenda set by contemporary activism. The natural can represent, and has represented, what is given, stable, and conservative, or what is lost and must be recovered through radical action. Nature has been a gift of God, the realm of the amoral and the inculpable, and the product of sin marked by incessant suffering.

Historical understandings of the natural can differ markedly from our own (as varied as these may be). What looks to us like pollution can have looked, in the communities we study, like nature. In my own work, coal smoke in Pittsburgh in the 1790s was evidence of natural abundance, praised within the same sentences as lush vegetation and well-drained soil. In the 19203, nature in Pittsburgh took the form of unexpected owls nesting in residential suburbs adjacent to industrial districts and, in fiction, of window-box flowers overgrowing skyscrapers and hastening Pittsburgh's eclipse as steelmaker by Gary and Birmingham. In the 1930s, nature offered the promise of stability and recovery-in part through the founding resources of the city, its rivers and its "belly rich with coal." But nature was also the character-the nature-of its laborers, on whom the city's return to industrial greatness depended as surely as it did on the natural laws that connect coal and rivers to human work. Nature's laws and nature's assurance were embodied, for one local poet in 1932, in "the hiss of a cigarette, dropped by a bum in the river."

While attention to the political and ideological deployment of the natural can help environmental history to escape from characterization as a branch of environmentalism, it also can help to make it more politically useful. It can, as Douglas says, help us to "recognise each environment as a mask and support for a certain kind of society" and to turn our political attention to "the value of th[e] social form which demands our scrutiny just as clearly as the purity of milk and air and water."

Enlarge 200%
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A Winter Night in Cordova, Alaska, 1917.

[Author Affiliation]
Angela Gugliotta is a lecturer and research associate in environmental studies and humanities at the University of Chicago. She recently completed her dissertation, "'Hell With the Lid Taken Off': A Cultural History of Air PollutionPittsburgh," under the direction of Christopher Hamlin. She has published articles in Environmental History, The Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences and in collections edited by Joel Tarr and Melanie DuPuis.

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movement scholarship

Ramachandra Guha. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 40-41 (2 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Guha talks about the US and India's traditions of environmental scholarship. Among other things, his own wish list for environmental history is that they will soon have fine and detailed studies of the "ecological footprint" of the US and of the cities of modern India.

Full Text (755 words)

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THE COUNTRIES I know best are India and the United States. Both have vigorous environmental movements, and both also have robust traditions of environmental scholarship.

There is, in fact, a direct connection between the one and the other. In both countries, it was social movements that provoked scholars to study aspects of their history that they had previously ignored. In India, the vast records of the Forest Department were untouched by, indeed unknown to, historians-until the celebrated Chipko movement sent them to search for the roots of peasant discontent with state forestry. In the United States, the environmental movement of the Sixties likewise catalyzed interest in forgotten precursors-so much so that, through the labors of historians, the likes of John Muir and Aldo Leopold have become much better known now than they ever were in their own lifetimes.

There is much to be said in favor of "movement scholarship." By taking cues from society, rather than from only academic journals or books, we were able to fashion the new and exciting field of "environmental history." By animating our work with passion and commitment, we were able to write histories more readable and more compelling than those authored by our more detached, so to say "objective," contemporaries.

However, this hitching of the scholarly cart to the movement wagon has come at a cost. Activist historians are prone only to see what the activists themselves do. Or they tend to take partisan sides on behalf of one ideologue or another, one sect or another. Above all, they neglect, in their scholarly work, themes and topics that are neglected hy the movement as a whole.

One illustration of this is the neglect by American historians of the question of consumption, which, back in 1958, John Kenneth Galbraith had referred to as the "forbidden question" of the environmental movement.1 That it still remains; thus, American environmentalists are notably insular in their concerns-seriously worried about the threats to the American wilderness and waters, but somewhat unconcerned about the global consequences of the consumer society, the impact on land, soil, forests, and climate elsewhere. At the time of the first Gulf War, the leftwing British newspaper, The Guardian, joked that the war was carried out to safeguard not democracy but the American Way of Driving. (One

might say the same of the second Gulf War.) American historians, however, have failed to heed the wisdom in that throwaway remark, thus to reveal in all its starkness the ecological imperialism of the sole superpower in the world. They have reproduced in their own work the insularity of the environmental movement as a whole, with the singular exception of Richard Tucker, whose book Insatiable Appetite points the direction in which future research might, rather should, go.2

By the same token, the chief deficiency in Indian environmental scholarship merely reproduces the major weakness of the Indian environmental movement. Following its main inspiration, Mahatma Gandhi, this movement has turned its hack on the city, choosing to work instead with peasants, pastoralists, tribes, and fisherfolk. The historians have done likewise. Thus we have had major struggles against commercial forestry and against large dams (on behalf of the rural communities to be displaced by them); and thus also we have numerous historical studies of forest policy and water management. The urban environment is neglected by activists; and predictably, by scholars as well. India soon will have the largest urban population in the world, yet we know far less than we ought to about the history of ecological conditions within cities or of their claims on the resources of the hinterland.3

This then, is my own wish list for environmental history: that we will soon have fine, detailed studies of the "ecological footprint" of the United States, and of the cities of modern India.

[Footnote]
NOTES
1. John Kenneth Galbraith, "How Much Should a Country Consume?" in Perspectives on Conservation: Essays on America's Natural Resources, ed. Henry Jarrett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1958).
2. Richard Tucker, Insatiable Appetite: The U. S. and the Ecological Degradation of the Tropical World (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
3. If the work of Richard Tucker stands out in the American context, to search for a suitable Indian "exception" we need to go back some eighty years, to the studies of Patrick Geddes on the ecology of Indian cities.

[Author Affiliation]
Ramachandra Cuba's books include The Unquiet Woods and Environmentalism: A Global History. He is completing a book whose working title is Gandhians and Greens: The Practice and Theory of Environmentalism.

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true environmental history

Marcus Hall. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 42-43 (2 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Hall shares Mark Cioc's recent eco-biography of the Rhine River and found out that the rise and fall of the Rhine is fortunately rising again, with public concerns and international treaties helping to clean up its polluted waters. In re-reading William Cronon's preface to the book, he agreed that Cioc may well have given "the first true environmental history of a major European river." Hall elaborates.

Full Text (1063 words)

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MARK CIOC'S RECENT eco-biography of the Rhine appeared auspiciously as I was settling into my new home at the headwaters of that drainage. His was a potent reminder that while most of us living in northern Switzerland fix our gaze on the mountains, much of what we throw out or flush down eventually makes its way into that great river, which with each new bend flows slower, darker, and dirtier on its approach to the North Sea. The rise and fall of the Rhine, I found out, is fortunately rising again, with public concerns and international treaties helping to clean up its polluted waters. In re-reading William Cronon's preface to the book, I agreed that Cioc may well have given us "the first true environmental history of a major European river." And then, I realize now, it was this simple assertion that stuck for me: While I agree that Cioc's work is a marvelous contribution, I have at odd moments ever since wondered just what true environmental histories might entail.

With these words, Cronon meant of course that the book represented good scholarship, and was asking questions that hadn't quite been asked before. Appearing as it did in 2002, Cronon's statement was also a declaration that environmental history had finally arrived, a confirmation that most scholars now knew about this field, that most universities offered courses in its subjects, and more importantly, that the reading public had even encountered studies similar to this one before. More subtly, this statement implied that there were true environmental historians, and Mark Cioc certainly fits the description as a respected, established-card-carryingmember of this particular guild of the historical profession. We now have tenuretrack environmental historians, and perhaps that greatest legitimization of a field, our own encyclopedia covering the topic in three volumes.

It is for me immensely gratifying to see the field closest to my toils and aspirations receiving its due. But while I applaud bigger, better, wider, more nuanced environmental history scholarship, I think there are several cautionary remarks that need whispering between back slaps and victory shouts. Beware of inbreeding and clubishness. Beware of rapid growth and lust for size. Beware of losing moral purpose (in some ultimate sense). And lastly, speak less of true environmental histories, but more of true environmental historians.

Let me try to explain. I am convinced that environmental history is what environmental historians do, and that we are much wiser to define our field by its practitioners than by its subject matter. The ASEH must be viewed as a community first and a scholarly pursuit second. Rigorous efforts to define the field or police its borders will bring vacuous results and hard feelings. At the same time, close-knit groups of practitioners can lead to narcissism and even exclusion, and part of ASEH's success has been its ability to welcome a variety of newcomers, within and beyond universities-and even beyond borders. But the "A" in our society's acronym can be off-putting: that letter may simply designate the base of operations or the main geographic interest of its members, yet it is also excluding potential members and so squelching innovation. A better model would promote an umbrella organization having regional chapters within an international society, an ISEH.

Environmental historians will be quick to point out that growth brings its own problems. I, too, would hardly relish attending environmental history meetings as sprawling as AHA or AAG conferences or (so I'm told) the Congrès International des Sciences Historique. Part of our society's secret has been its manageable size and ability to change with the times. So while some environmental historians after the events of 9-11 expressed dismay about their own research agendas (which paid scant attention to

terror and bloodshed), others began following Edmund Russell's lead by scrutinizing their environments from a soldier's eye view. As environmental history societies grow, they may eventually tire of maintaining an awkward unity of distantly related "interest groups" as is attempted by other scholarly societies in, say, geography, anthropology, or ecology. Better to splinter off into new sub-societies and smaller groups than to wallow in too-muchness. The study of nature and culture through time does include everything (and not all of it is historical!), and so there will be a day when even the upcoming New Environmental History will seem passé. As scholarly evolution rolls forward, one must be dedicated to colleagues more than to scholarly societies, committed to seeking answers more than to pursuing fields.

There is also the crucial importance of not overlooking the moral purpose that gestated the field, and originally brought society members together. I don't think environmental historians can or should be disinterested, and this is precisely why our public and our students are so enthralled with it. Rigorous scholarship is also part of that moral imperative, and so it is the tension between our agendas and, er, truth that I think keeps us going back to very dusty and sometimes very boring archives. Relevancy is key. Studies about war and nature may be more important right now than wilderness. Trendiness is our middle name, but we should embrace rather than spurn it. As Donald Worster intimated during the society's banquet last year in Victoria, clever scholarship and good stories alone are not enough to save the earth and its inhabitants.

True environmental historians, then, are mostly interested in getting out their messages. We need films, radios, and newspapers to spread our messages. Believe it or not, most people don't read anymore, much less flip through scholarly journals. Journalists should be contacted and offered press conferences. We need to practice speaking to our publics more than to our scholarly colleagues, to foundation directors more than to college presidents. J. B. Jackson was enormously effective because he celebrated rather than criticized the vernacular. Be sure to look carefully over Michael Pollan's Botany of Desire, Anne Matthews' Wild Nights, and Mark Kurlansky's Cod to see how they do it. Be sure also to consider what true environmental history would be without its star practitioners.

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longitudes and latitudes

David Igler. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 44-46 (3 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Igler shares Captain James Cook's exploration of the Pacific Ocean, which reflects his current attraction to ocean basins as frameworks for historical analysis, and more specifically, the Pacific Ocean as a site of ecological exchanges, exploitations, and migrations. Among others, Cook supplied himself with four recently invented "clock machines"--chronometers--that allows him to establish longitude readings, and when combined with latitude readings, enabled precise surveying work of islands and continental shorelines.

Full Text (1042 words)

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BEFORE LEAVING England in 1772 on his second voyage to the Pacific Ocean, Captain James Cook supplied himself with four recently invented "clock machines" that promised to record reliable time at sea. These chronometers-the name wouldn't stick until the 37805-allowed Cook to establish longitude readings, and when combined with latitude readings, enabled precise surveying work of islands and continental shorelines. The "watches," as Cook frequently referred to them, cost the British Admiralty a small fortune; to Cook they were priceless. Cook kept the chronometers in locked wooden boxes and issued keys to the first lieutenant, the onboard astronomer, and himself. Cook gave orders that some combination of these individuals "were always to be present at the winding them up, and the comparing one with the other." Longitude and latitude served Cook and subsequent Pacific navigators exceedingly well, for among other reasons, returning to previously recorded coordinates (such as an island with wood and water) was a useful skill when exploring an ocean that covered one-third of the earth's surface.

This nautical anecdote reflects my current attraction to ocean basins as frameworks for historical analysis, and more specifically, the Pacific Basin as a site of ecological exchanges, exploitations, and migrations. Ocean basins provide (dare 1 say?) natural contexts in which to study human and non-human interactions, in part because they offer the possibility of moving us beyond the nation-state and terrestrial-based boundaries that often awkwardly fit our studies of nature as a historical force. However-and let me be clear about this-mine is not a call for environmental historians to scrap land-based parameters of the local, regional, or national variety, and suddenly embrace waterscapes as more useful frameworks. Instead, I want to encourage us to exploit more fully those necessary coordinates of eighteenth-century sea-faring exploration: longitude and latitude.

As some of our field's recent and most celebrated books attest, environmental history may provide an unparalleled opportunity for studying history's length and breadth, its longitudes and latitudes. Or, to restate a mantra of the field, ecological factors both unite and divide human societies throughout time and around the globe. Longitudinal studies offer us a long-range vision into the past and reveal how human thought, institutions, and actions have confronted the environment across the centuries. Latitudinal studies are by nature comparative, transnational, and/or global, and at their best, they enlighten us about the world while simultaneously shedding new light on issues and places closer to home.

Three examples of latitudinal history immediately jump to mind: J. R. McNeill's Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the TwentiethCentury World (W.W. Norton, 2001), Ramachandra Guha's slender volume Environmentalism: A Global History (Longman, 1999), and Alfred W. Crosby's classic study Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 9001900 (Cambridge, 1986) (which is quite longitudinal as well). The sheer breadth of these studies can stagger the imagination, ranging across continents for specific forces of ecological and historical change. In them we find the actors, ideas, and non-human elements that fuse and sometimes separate the human predicament of living on earth. Future latitudinal studies hopefully will build upon these attributes and also take us in new and surprising directions. For instance, I would greatly appreciate a global history of twentieth-century urbanism that actually takes seriously the concept of cities as urban ecosystems. My wish list also would include a comparative treatment of disease etiology in pre-modern England and China. But wish lists aside, latitudinal studies in environmental history should build upon the comparative and transnational energies of today's scholarship while utilizing the interdisciplinary tools from which our

field originated.

While enthralled by examples of broad, latitudinal history, I find myself equally engrossed with the finely honed longitudinal approach. Scale matters a great deal, Richard White reminds us, and the local scale remains imperative in this era of breakneck globalization, especially when that local study has the longitudinal capacity to carry us across centuries. White's first book, Land Use, Environment, and Social Change: The Shaping of Island County, Washington (University of Washington, 1979), may have pioneered the local-and richly longitudinal-study for a generation of environmental historians. If the purely place-centered local study seems outmoded to many of today's environmental historians, some of White's students are creatively refining the approach. Joseph Taylor's Making Salmon: An Environmental History of the Northwest Fisheries Crisis (University of Washington, 1999) de-centers the local place for the 125-year historical process of fisheries exploitation. Longitudinal studies of specific issues or sets of ideas continue to offer tremendous possibilities. Donald Worster's Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas (Cambridge, 1985) remains one of my favorite texts in this regard, in part for its evocative writing and stories, and yet also for its 25o-year exploration of specific ecological ideas. Such longitudinal historiesambitious and clearly daunting for most historians these days-provide us with a crucial temporal telescope to view human and non-human interactions on earth. The point is not simply to extend the timeline of any given study, but instead to develop in a longitudinal fashion those issues and processes that most reflect and refract historical interactions with nature.

What can an appreciation of latitude and longitude offer future environmental histories? Rather than criss-crossing the Pacific for years on end, Captain James Cook could quickly return to the Hawaiian Islands in 1778 (for his death, as fate and the islanders would have it) because months earlier he had accurately recorded the islands' longitude and latitude. He knew the islands' coordinates, even if he didn't know how to behave once he arrived there. Environmental historians share a similar need for latitude and longitude because our unique causal agents of change-"nature" and ecological processes-span the globe and traverse the centuries. In this age of global positioning systems, historians still need to know more than simply our distance from the equator or time from Greenwich Mean; instead, we need to follow those latitude and longitude lines around the earth and see what else is out there.

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"Husking the Corn in New England," 1858.

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David Igler is assistant professor of history at the University of California, Irvine. He is the author of Industrial Cowboys: Miller & Lux and the Transformation of the Far West, 1850-1920 (California, 2001), and currently is working on a history of the eastern Pacific Basin prior to 1850.

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body and place

Susan D Jones. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 47-49 (3 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Envisioning future directions for environmental history presents little difficulty; rather, the challenges lies in elucidating the details of the routes it will travel and the setbacks it might encounter. Environmental history will become increasingly interconnected with other disciplines. Jones details a brief examination of some of the field's strengths, one example of a future path, and some obstacles to its continuing journey.

Full Text (971 words)

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ENVISIONING FUTURE directions for environmental history presents little difficulty; rather, the challenge lies in elucidating the details of the routes it will travel and the setbacks it might encounter. Environmental history will become increasingly interconnected with other disciplines. What follows is a brief examination of some of the field's strengths, one example of a future path, and some obstacles to its continuing journey.

Environmental history offers much to other historical sub-disciplines, to the broader study of the past, and to other fields of inquiry. Scholars have plumbed the ecological sciences for theory, using ideas about climax and succession and material flows, for example. From Frederick Jackson Turner to Cold War rhetoric, these theories have found social and political purchase, yet they represent only the tip of the iceberg. Indigenous or "street level" knowledge of the environment and the cycles of living things has long informed the social practices and cultural beliefs of peoples throughout time and around the world, and these theories deserve the attention that more formalized "scientific" theories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have drawn. Methodologically, environmental history reminds historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and others that nonhuman actors have played important roles in "making history," influencing cultural practices and determining the shape of social institutions. These theoretical and methodological contributions have been particularly useful to the increasing number of scholars engaged in transnational and interdisciplinary studies. One such interdisciplinary study lies at the intersection between health, disease, and environment. Historical events and ideas associated with health typically have been the province of historians of medicine and public health, who have focused on human bodies and populations. Recently, some historians have departed from this approach by "ecologizing" their examinations of health and disease in humans and animals (although this idea is hardly new). Recent scholarship (the 2004 issue of the research journal Osiris, for example) focuses on occupational health, colonial diseases, zoonotic diseases, and resultant public health policies. By including places as well as bodies in their work, these historians seek to understand health and disease as notions embedded in the lived experience of the sufferers in their daily environments. These analyses also often depend on non-human actors (such as microbes, tsetse flies, and cattle) that have altered our understanding of the role played by disease throughout social, cultural, and political history. The importance of environmental notions of health does not end with disease outbreaks; as scholars such as Conevery Bolton Valencius have shown, the very identities of historical actors were comprised in part by their linked perceptions of their health and the landscape in which they lived. Metaphors of environment and disease-weeds "spreading like cancer" or ill urbanites

living in "miasmatic" conditions-remind us of the power of these linkages. Methodologically and theoretically, environmental history and the history of health and disease have a great deal to offer one another. This example represents but one path for historians to extend the reach of environmental history.1

Along the way, environmental history's theoretical and methodological components will continue to be critically examined. For example, the "reality question" that has dogged social studies of science (e.g. Bruno Latour, Pandora's Hope) may present an obstacle for environmental history as well. The old solipsistic question of the tree falling in the forest has been joined by the challenges of competing cosmologies, critiques of "actor-network theory," and questions about ontological diversity. How do we know what we know? What if material objects or material flows have divergent meanings to different observers, even while everyone can agree that they have "real" effects? Methods are potentially just as contentious as theory: Will historians be willing to accord the status of "actor" to non-human things such as plants, animals, bacteria, and the weather? Is human history devoid of any attention to these issues deficient, as some environmental historians would argue, or is environmental history as a methodology limited in its utility to other historians? Finally, those of us arguing for the extension of environmental history into new areas could get what we asked for and more: a field so widely incorporated into other disciplines, so cavalier about boundaries, that it may cease to exist as an independent entity. Besides being a victim of its own success, environmental history also could also lose some of its distinctive identity as its practitioners incorporate anthropological, sociological, and other sources of new theories and methodologies.2

Despite these potential pitfalls, I remain optimistic about the future of environmental history. Although the environment has not yet become, in Adam Rome's words, "a basic category of historical analysis," I believe that environmental history's methodological and theoretical offerings will increasingly be used by historians and other scholars. It is difficult for me to envision it losing its identity even as it becomes more conversant with other disciplines. An examination of the interrelationships between humans and the natural world-ever dynamic, and relevant to each generation-will continue to be its keystone and its unique contribution.3

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[Footnote]
NOTES
1. Gregg Mitman, Michelle Murphy, and Christopher Sellers, "Landscapes of Exposure: Knowledge and Illness in Modern Environments," Osiris 19 (2004); Conevery Bolton Valencius, The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
2. Bruno Latour, Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
3. Adam Rome, "What Really Matters in History? Environmental Perspectives on Modern America," Environmental History 7 (April 2002): 303-18.

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globalizing american environmental history

Thomas Lekan. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 50-52 (3 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

One way to globalize American environmental history would be a renewed commitment within the environmental history community to comparative analysis of major themes across different nations, regions, and cities. Lekan envisions a series of conferences, articles, essay collections, monographs, and grant proposals devoted to what J. R. McNeil has termed "mid-level generalizations" about the role of economic structures, political institutions, legal systems, cultural values, and technological infrastructures in shaping globally significant patterns of environmental exploitation, adaptation, perception, and crisis in North American and abroad.

Full Text (1184 words)

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RECENTLY A COLLEAGUE of mine invited me to lead a session on environmental history in his graduate historiography seminar. My task was to moderate a discussion of an article surveying the field of environmental history and to speak about how its ideas applied to my own research. For the discussion my colleague had selected Richard Grove's chapter "Environmental History" in Peter Burke's well-received collection New Perspectives on Historical Writing(Penn State, 2001), an essay 1 had not read previously. I assumed, erroneously, that it would be a standard survey of the field's intellectual origins and methodological concerns similar to well-known articles on the subject by scholars such as Richard White, Donald Worster, Alfred Crosby, Ted Steinberg, and J. R. McNeil. I was thus unprepared for Grove's approach: a scathing, revisionist history of the discipline that lambasted North American scholars' "parochial takeover bid" of the designation "environmental history" in the 1970s. Echoing his arguments in Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860 (Cambridge University Press, 1995), Grove asserted that evidence of environmental degradation in the colonial periphery spurred the development of

Francophone and Old World Anglophone environmental history among geographers, anthropologists, and ecologists long before Rachel Carson's Silent Spring (Houghton Mifflin, 1962) raised environmental consciousness and Roderick Nash's Wilderness and the American Mind (Yale University Press, 1967) made environmental history a respectable subfield in the United States.

Not surprisingly, the seminar turned out to be a decidedly awkward exchange. Since most of the students in the seminar had never before encountered environmental history in any form, Grove's iconoclastic account leftmost of them uncertain about the definition, scope, and achievements of the field. My attempt to describe familiar works by Worster, Bill Cronon, and Arthur McEvoy only compounded their confusion. I came away frustrated by my inability to reconcile Grove's account with other narratives about the field and to persuade this fresh group of graduate students to consider incorporating environmental themes into their emerging MA and PhD theses. Despite my reservations about the tone of Grove's critique, however, my encounter with his essay did lead me to a series of productive observations and questions about the field of environmental history. These inform my comments about where the field might go next.

As a U.S. environmental historian working on German and European themes and an active member of both the ASEH and the ESEH (European Society for Environmental History), I am concerned that Grove's caustic comments about North American scholarship reflect a deeper if often unarticulated discontent among scholars located or working on topics outside the United States. Grove is not the first to lament the "Americo-centrism" of environmental history, particularly what he terms the "wilderness obsession." But current geopolitical alignments give his criticism of U.S. scholars' lack of engagement with the rest of the world a sharper edge that may result in diverging environmental-historical agendas with limited opportunities for trans-continental dialogue, debate, and synthesis. These observations lead me to two interrelated questions about future directions. Given American academia's perceived overweening influence on global intellectual trends, how can scholars of other regions of the world benefit from and simultaneously help to globalize the methodologically sophisticated but sometimes narrow preoccupations of North American environmental historiography? And how can environmental historians maintain their openness to interdisciplinary approaches and wide-ranging subject matter while fostering a common body of scholarship that enables us to speak to each other across national, linguistic, or cultural divides?

One way to globalize American environmental history would be a renewed commitment within the environmental history community to comparative analysis of major themes across different nations, regions, and cities. Here I envision a series of conferences, articles, essay collections, monographs, and grant proposals devoted to what J. R. McNeil has termed "mid-level generalizations" about the role of economic structures, political institutions, legal systems, cultural values, and technological infrastructures in shaping globally significant patterns of environmental exploitation, adaptation, perception, and crisis in North American and abroad.1 This is not a call for macro-level, world environmental history, which is well-represented in the profession and has produced fine narratives about the agrarian impact of European colonialism and the spread of European diseases among aboriginal peoples in the Americas and Australia. The scale of such studies, however, obscures the role of regional and national variation, including the resiliency of local ecosystems, the coerciveness of the state, or the character of the political culture, in shaping the environmental past. Writing in collaborative partnership, environmental historians interested in the middle range of comparative analysis could examine familiar issues in a new light and find common ground along thematic lines.

Such mid-level synthesis has recently proven fruitful in spurring scholarly exchange between U.S. and European scholars, as indicated by the numerous panels and articles devoted to Daniel Rodger's impressive Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age (Belknap, 2000). Environmental history awaits a similar work; numerous themes cry out for comparative analysis. For example, is wilderness truly a product of an "American identity crisis" with little relevance to other regions, as Grove asserts? Surely recent analyses of American wilderness fascination as product of capitalist core-periphery relationships on the North American continent parallel Grove's examination of British imperial geographers' metropolitan interest in overseas environmental degradation on the colonial periphery. Bill Cronon's critique of Americans' bifurcation of their landscapes into "pristine" and "fallen" zones also reflects global patterns of post-colonial environmental perception, as African environmental

historians' attempts to debunk Western scholars' "degradation narratives" about sub-Saharan regions have demonstrated. Another theme that animates cross-continental scholarship is natural disaster. European scholars have produced an impressive record of natural disasters, particularly flood events, dating back to the medieval period. They are keenly interested in the role of local political systems, property regimes, and religious beliefs in exacerbating, mitigating, or rationalizing the effect of these "acts of God." Yet at a recent ESEH conference, there was no mention of Ted Steinberg's Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America (Oxford, 2000), a work that addresses the social and economic injustices that produce natural calamities. This lack of cross-cultural dialogue seemed to me a missed opportunity-for collaborative research, for multi-year and multiinstitutional grants, for a common historiographical agenda, which are indispensable for a global community of environmental historians.

[Footnote]
NOTES
1. J. R. McNeill, "Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History," History and Theory, Theme Issue 42 (December 2003): 5-43, here 9. McNeill's excellent survey of global environmental history in this article informs many of my observations in this piece. McNeill's book Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000) offers tantalizing places to begin formulating a comparative research agenda. See, for example, McNeill's comments on ecological footprint analysis and pollution control in chapter 3.

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transformative environmental history

Michael Lewis. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 53-55 (3 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

In the last thirty years the first generations of scholars to call themselves "environmental historians" succeeded in transforming the larger historical discipline and in creating a research agenda that shows no signs of losing its steam. Environmental history has professionalized, and for the continuous transformation of the environmental history, Lewis suggests three paths people might continue to explore--global, interdisciplinary and synthesize.

Full Text (1012 words)

Copyright Environmental History Jan 2005

IN THE LAST thirty years the first generations of scholars to call themselves "environmental historians" succeeded in transforming the larger historical discipline and in creating a research agenda that shows no signs of losing its steam. I have every confidence that the next thirty years will continue to see environmental historians working in the productive niches opened up by these pioneers. A new research agenda or focus for the field is not needed in order to maintain its viability. Environmental history has professionalized-we have a thriving journal, vibrant annual conferences (with a somewhat predictable range of panel themes), an ALCS-recognized professional society, and tenure-track positions devoted to environmental history at a growing number of universities. Careers can, have, and will be made by participating in this "normal" environmental history.

We should aspire to more than viability for environmental history, though. As we look ahead to the next thirty years, we might think about supplementing, not replacing, the productive lines of inquiry that all of us are familiar with and most of us have worked along. To that end, I can suggest three paths we might continue to explore-for none of these ideas are novel, but neither are they the dominant trend in our discipline at the moment: We must think more globally, embrace interdisciplinary work, and we must write more synthetic histories. If we succeed in doing so, I suspect that we will continue in the grandest tradition of our predecessors as transformative influences within the larger historical discipline, and we will minimize the risk of environmental history becoming an increasingly specialized and inward-looking sub-field with our own language, our own arguments, and our own (limited) audience.

Global: The basic knowledge of local case studies is essential to any grounded historical understanding. Further, our training predisposes us to conduct our research as scholars of particular nation-states or regions. Environmental historians, though, are aware of how interconnected histories of different parts of the globe can be. Ideas, people, birds, pollution-all these and more are flaunters of geopolitical boundaries. In a twenty-first-century world where people are increasingly attuned to global connections (and disconnections), histories that focus on our shared past will be relevant and needed. Even for scholars trained in U.S. history, it is not impossible, nor even that difficult, to choose to investigate connections between the United States and some other part of the world. Doing so will illuminate not just the history of the "other" place studied, but will also deepen our understanding of the United States. This is particularly relevant for environmental history, where so many of the processes and trends that we study have been exported throughout the globe in the twentieth century as development and modernization, and given that American individuals, corporations, and ideas have played key roles in transforming such a varied range of places in the world. All of us must become at least part-time world historians. To fail to do so will be to awkwardly shunt off our scholarship from its natural course.

Interdisciplinary. Environmental history is in many ways interdisciplinary, from its use of the insights of other disciplines such as ecology and geography to its links with American studies (a training ground for many practicing environmental historians, including myself). All signs indicate that the next thirty years will witness a boom in environmental-studies programs at universities across the United States, and as in the many existing programs, environmental historians will play a key role in this development. As of yet, though, most environmental history scholarship has been only lightly touched by the literature and insights of related disciplines (with the possible exception of ecology). We work well together on committees, but we do not cite each other's scholarship, go to each other's conferences, or publish in each other's journals. All of us who have worked in environmental studies believe that understanding environmental change requires the insights of multiple disciplines. Insofar as we aspire to write histories that recognize that same complexity in the past, we must begin to learn more biology, more economics, more sociology, more philosophy-in short we must learn environmental studies with our students.

Synthesize: Carefully focused studies are needed to finish PhDs, to publish first books, and to get tenure. But we need more mid-career environmental historians to take two steps back, pull together

the several case studies related to a particular topic near to their heart, and write some daring syntheses-make some grand claims, inevitably make some mistakes, and stir debate. Environmental history is now mature enough as a field that we have dozens upon dozens of local case histories, as dissertations and monographs. Most will never find an audience outside of graduate schools. Syntheses will. I can think of recent examples that have succeeded brilliantly. There should be more, and risky attempts at syntheses should continue to be encouraged in our conferences and journal.

In addition to summarizing environmental history scholarship in synthetic works, we should take our insights and approaches to other historical topics. We should aspire to grand histories-environmental history, for instance, is uniquely positioned to tell the story (or several stories) of modernity, industrialization, and the growth of nation-states. But why stop there? Why must environmental historians always place subtitles after the colon, "The Environmental History of X?" Why aren't environmental historians aspiring to write "The History of X" itself?

As a graduate student I had the good fortune of conducting an interview with a senior environmental historian for a small local journal-he claimed that environmental history attempts to "see the world whole." If we truly attempt to do this, and to conceive of our scholarship in this fashion, environmental history looks increasingly less like a sub-field of history, and more like the field itself. Doing scholarship that is global, interdisciplinary, and synthetic is one way to move in that direction.

Enlarge 200%
Enlarge 400%

Lumbering in the Florida Keys, 1882.

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why china?

Robert B Marks. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 56-58 (3 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

For at least two thousand years, the population of China has counted for one-quarter to one-third of all of humanity. Before 1800 and the industrially driven rise to global dominance of western Europe and northern America during the 19th century, China also accounted for one-third of the world's economic activity, and it was the richest and most powerful state on Earth. Marks discusses why many myths and preconceptions about Oriental despotism and other explanations for Chinese poverty and European wealth, which for most of the 20th century have been taken to be true.

Full Text (1292 words)

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FOR AT LEAST the last two thousand years, the population of China has counted for one-quarter to one-third of all of humanity. Before 1800 and the industrially driven rise to global dominance of western Europe and northern America during the nineteenth century, China also accounted for one-third of the world's economic activity, and it was the richest and most powerful state on Earth. Given that global weight, it is not surprising that what happened in China mattered to the rest of the world.

Frederick Teggart demonstrated linkages between the Han Chinese and Roman empires, E. N. Gumilev showed that the strength of the Chinese state periodically sent nomadic warriors back across the steppe toward Europe, William McNeill argued that China's economic revolution during the Song dynasty (9601279) pulled Europe out of the depths of the Dark Ages and toward the Renaissance, and the Mongol highway across Eurasia provided the route for the spread of the bubonic plague from southwestern China to the Black Sea and Mediterranean. More recently, Andre Gunder Frank, Richard von Glahn, and Kenneth Pomeranz have shown how China's demand for silver during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) fueled a global demand that sucked as much as half of New World silver production to China.1 It flowed out again only when British opium from its Indian colony flooded China and contributed to its late-nineteenthcentury image as the "sick man of Asia."' But what was the global environmental impact of China's huge economy and consumption of goods from around the world? With one exception, we barely know.1

China's great reversal of fortune during the nineteenth century-from being the wealthiest and most powerful empire for most of recorded hi story, to becoming poor and backward compared to the surging West-provided modern social science with many myths and preconceptions about "Oriental despotism" and other explanations for Chinese poverty and European wealth, which for most of the twentieth century have been taken to be "true." Since 1980, though, scholarship based on access to Chinese archival sources has chipped away at the underpinnings of a social science built on the contrast of a "stagnant" China with the "dynamic" West, enabling R. Bin Wong, Frank, Pomeranz, and myself, among others, to explode those myths.4

Environmental historians of China have contributed significantly to these broader scholarly trends. With two thousand years of a (more or less) unified empire, and three thousand years of written records, China presents a unique opportunity to understand the long-term relationship between the ways in which people have changed their environment and the way in which that changed environment has affected the range of human action. But it was not until the 1990s that one could speak of the emergence of the field of Chinese environmental history. The defining event was the 1993 Conference on the History of the Environment in China that brought together most of the historians around the

world working on various aspects of environmental change in China. The published conference papers constitute the best summary of the state of the field.5

Despite the richness of China's historical documents, the length of its history, and its weight in human affairs, the development of Chinese environmental history faces numerous challenges. Most immediately, more scholars need to enter the field, cognizant of the difficulties of learning the Chinese language. But even with the necessary language skills, conceptual challenges abound. Just think about the size and diversity of the place we call China. Historians of China-larger than the United States and arguably with more ecosystems than any other countryhave recognized the utility of regional approaches. Even then, the regions are the size of European countries; my own work on the region of South China known as Lingnan encompassed an area as large as France and with a population even larger.6 Nonetheless, this regional approach has yielded numerous excellent studies, although still too few to enable a general environmental history of China.

That is not to say that there are no national-level studies, for there are, especially for the People's Republic of China, 1949-present.7 But for the longer historical perspective that China makes possible-two- to three-thousand yearssuch a history requires an historian of exceptional skill and maturity. To date, only one scholar has taken on this huge task. Mark Elvin's Retreat of the Elephants is a magnificent book (but hardly the last word), taking the very long-term view of history, blending his own original research with other studies, and exploring the ways in which Chinese understood their relationship with the environment. Acknowledging the chasm between the reality of the massive remaking of the environment at the hands of Chinese farmers and the state, and the assumption that the Chinese had a more environmentally friendly view of the place of people in the environment (as, for example, in their famed landscape paintings), Elvin suggests that whereas Chinese may have loved individual trees, they hated forests.8

Perhaps that continuing attitude helps explain why there are so few Chinese environmental historians, and why such a field of inquiry does not yet exist in China. But hopefully that will change, as concern with contemporary environmental issues prompts Chinese scholars to examine the historical origins of current problems. And if, in addition, more Western historians learn Chinese, we will be better positioned to gain a more synthetic picture of China's environmental history and its place in global processes. My guess is that premodern processes of environmental change have been global for quite some time, and that China will turn out to have been a significant driving force of premodern global environmental change.

[Footnote]
NOTES
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6. Robert B. Marks, Tigers, Rice, Silk and Silt: Environment and Economy in Late Imperial South China (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
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Cambridge University Press, 2001).
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africa's environmental footprints

James C McCann. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 59-60 (2 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

The historiography of Africa's environmental past in the first decade of the 21st century reflects its germination in a number of sites and national academic cultures in Europe and America where both African and Western environmental historians published and received their training. Beyond this institutional structure, McCann anticipates two complementary trends, including emerging a research agenda that views current and historical landscapes not as postmodernist cultural constructions or as abstract economic models, but as complex but distinctive environmental footprints of particular historical conjunctures that are economic, demographic, and social.

Full Text (958 words)

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THE HISTORIOGRAPHY of Africa's environmental past in the first decade of the twenty-first century reflects its germination in a number of sites and national academic cultures in Europe and America where both African and Western environmental historians publish and received their training. One can nevertheless argue also that the shape of the field will derive from some aspects of Africa's demographic and environmental exceptionalism. Most Africans nowadays are under sixteen years old and will live their lives not as idyllic environmental managers but in complex relationships to cities, national markets, and in life paths buffeted by global forces. Moreover, Africa is the globe's most rapidly urbanizing area. In these circumstances we can argue that local knowledge will be an important dynamic force in environmental management, but one that we know far too little about. We thus face continuing questions about what African landscapes looked like in the past and how they will appear in the future.

These questions are probably best answered by contributors to this journal, by assemblies of graduate students in Europe and the United States, and by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and foundations that fund research. Those groups certainly will include Africans, but regrettably probably not those based in African universities and ministries. Much or most of the environmental study by African colleagues consists of short-term consultancies driven by external priorities of NGOs or multilateral organizations rather than long-term research support. There is, however, a new trend I detect in which multilateral research organizations and foundations now have a set of international geographers and anthropologists-including Africans-situated in key leadership positions to set out new research agendas that we can hope will include environmental social science in a visible and influential role. (Here I mean collaborative international research organizations such as the International Centre for the Improvement of Wheat and Maize, the International Livestock Research Institute, and the West African Rice Development Agency.)

Beyond this institutional structure I anticipate two complementary trends. On the social-science side I see emerging a research agenda that views current and historical landscapes not as postmodernist cultural constructions or as abstract economic models, but as complex but distinctive "environmental footprints" of particular historical conjunctures that are economic, demographic, and social. For example, Richard Hoffman at York University recently has described what he calls the environmental footprint of the medieval European city in which he calculates energy flows, waste management, and food networks. For Africa we have no comparable historical studies yet, but we could usefully compare the environmental footprint of modern Timbuctu with that same city of the fifteenth century, or a nineteenth-century Shawan capital with twenty-firstcentury Addis Ababa. How does the environmental footprint of a collapsed state such as Sierra Leone or the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 19903 or Samori's empire in the nineteenth century compare to a more politically stable state like Senegal? Can we contrast the agrarian peri-urban "halo" of a colonial city like Nairobi to a pre-colonial setting like Kampala's Kibuga? Alternatively, particular staple-crop regimes, such as maize or cassava, certainly have a discernible footprint in terms of their economic and agronomic impact on a given landscape.

Finally, there is a second and quite different direction that I would like to suggest. In the 2003 meetings of the American Society for Environmental History, a panel on African environmental change reached a quite unanticipated consensus on a peculiar phenomenon: African elders in a variety of settings often portrayed past environmental conditions (states of forestation, fertility, and the like) in ways that were at odds with historical reconstructions based on contemporaneous records from photographs and archives. Why? A China panel at the 2004 ASEH meeting in Canada found similar conflicting historical narratives that pitted state narratives, NGO ideologies, and local "environmental transcripts" against one another. One explanation might be the effect of feedback, wherein local people have absorbed NGO and government narratives of historical landscapes. A second and more intriguing explanation is that there still exists a conceptual framework of human/nature interaction that has escaped our scholarly epistemology. I therefore would argue that environmental history of Africa needs to expand its embrace to include the humanities and philology of nature in past and present African systems of thought and action. How would this be done? I believe that we ought to seek to analyze texts (both oral and written) in an inquiry that parallels our productive dialogue with the natural sciences. An example of that is in my own work on the adoption of maize in Africa, where I have collected words for maize in various African languages to understand how Africans perceived that new plant, which arrived deus ex machina from the New World biome after 1500 AD, an exercise that offered considerable linguistic and lexical insights into conceptual frameworks of historical African farmers.

For this approach we may need to reinvent those scholarly traditions of philology that European and some African scholars have perfected over past generations. In my own case I wish to retool my research to take me back to primary sources in the form of liturgical texts, administrative documents, and literary treatises produced in Ethiopian languages. Of course not all African societies have Ethiopia's rich documentary traditions, but there will be analogous historical signs that reveal both practice and ideas regarding the natural world and humans' relationship to it. By including these concepts of nature, creation, and landscape, we may achieve a fuller view of Africa's environmental past.

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"follow the buyer"

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Abstract (Document Summary)

McCarthy shares why he believes that stories of consumers and producers are best told together and must be told together if one is to better understand human-caused environmental change. Among his observations, there is plenty of evidence about the behavior of consumers.

Full Text (1513 words)

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EVER SINCE I read Bill Cronon's Nature's Metropolis, I've been thinking about those Plains farm families as they looked at the Sears Roebuck Catalog. How could we understand Chicago and everything that city represented about the extraordinary transformation of the North American continent without knowing more about the hopes, dreams, motivations, and behavior of these people? How do we explain the unprecedented amount of human energy that they expended in pursuit of their personal and family agendas? If human economic activity-especially what people did as workers to feed, clothe, shelter, and otherwise entertain themselves-has been the major reason for human-caused environmental change, Cronon's farmers also brought to mind that old business school cliché that it takes a buyer as well as a seller to make a market. The folks out there changing the natural would not be out there for very long if customers were not paying for the work. More often than not, what those customers wanted had nothing to do with the transformation of the natural world. Yet that world changed nonetheless.

Cronon urged his readers to "follow the seller, follow the buyer." Good advice. He also argued that the stories of the city and the country are best told together. I believe that stories of consumers and producers are best told together and must be told together if we are to better understand human-caused environmental change. So I've been following the buyers. Let me share some observations from the field. First, there is plenty of evidence about the behavior of consumers. While few people confided their innermost thoughts to diaries when they went out and bought something, by the

twentieth century a veritable army of interested people observed and tried to explain consumer behavior. The evidence that these people left behind in mass-circulation periodicals, general business publications, trade journals, memoirs, the occasional open company records, and academic studies allows historians today to look over their shoulders and discern patterns in consumer behavior and even peak into that black box of motivation, the mind of the consumer. There are challenges to interpreting this evidence (often explained by the frustrated sales and marketing professionals who were paid to make sense of it in the first place), but no shortage of material.

Second, literature in the three historical fields most relevant to tracing connections between consumers, producers, and the environment is expanding rapidly. The creative ferment over the past quarter century in consumer and environmental history is pretty well known, although as yet there have been relatively few explicit attempts to connect the two. The reason for this is undoubtedly that much of the impact of the consumer on the natural world is mediated by the actions of producers, so that making the connections requires working in a third field, business history. But even that stodgy old field is in the midst of a creative revolution, thanks in good measure to the folks associated with the Hagley Museum, who have been encouraging and funding scholars who are "pushing the envelope." Historians interested in exploring connections between consumers and the environment now have a solid and growing body of scholarly work to build on in the relevant fields.

Finally, there is a growing literature on the psychology of human decision-making to help historians make sense of patterns in the evidence. Based on well-conceived social-science methodologies and new technologies like brain-imaging, this literature suggests several insights that are worth quickly sketching here. Creating and maintaining self-images-note the plural-are important motivators when it comes to consumer behavior. The identities that make up a self-image include, but are by no means limited to, race, class, and gender. Indeed, identities are often less as well as more encompassing than these. Emotions play an important role in economic decisions. Choices that we make today are heavily influenced by our predictions of how we will feel in the future as a consequence of these decisions. Positive and negative predictions are usually exaggerated by hope and fear respectively. Advertising, even that which is most acutely attuned to these insights, is not as persuasive as we sometimes imagine (and, in some surprising instances, like automobiles, seems to have little impact). What is important is what other people are doing, not so much the rich and the famous, but those close to us, especially those we perceive to be like us and those in contiguous groups that we aspire to join. When we buy something, any positive feelings that we experience do not last. We revert back to a neutral emotional set point, which explains the many studies that show that acquiring wealth or material possessions beyond what is necessary to make our lives comfortable and secure does not make us happier. If we want to feel good again, we need to buy something else, but, again, the benefit, if any, will be temporary. Because we do gain serial emotional satisfactions from buying things, we have great difficulty learning from experience and training ourselves to act in ways that can be shown to be more in our own self-interest-let alone the interest of others and the planet as a whole.

When we place what we learn about consumers in the larger democratic and free-market context that is America (and increasingly other parts of the world), certain questions take on greater salience. Consumer behavior often can seem shallow, diffuse, and manipulable-more dependent than independent variable. But I think we need to ask whether it is not also much more deeply rooted in human psychology and our experience of modernity than we commonly recognize. For example, are consumer goods (and the environmental changes that make them possible) an essential raw material of identity creation? Do consumers use goods to communicate emotionally important things to others that cannot be put into words? How well does a free-market economic system accommodate these deeper aims? Does the accelerating rate of change encouraged by the interaction of freemarket producers and consumers stimulate and reward consumer emotions (hope, envy, anxiety, etc.) that intensify this dynamic? Do consumers like this stimulation and reward, so that the personal emotions experienced by consumers in connection with goods outweigh the unintended consequences and suboptimal outcomes, even when these negatives are made known to consumers? If so, there are implications here for people who would like to change consumer behavior to moderate its impact on the environment. How much reform can be expected from dispassionate expertise alone in a democratic and free-market setting where counterarguments advanced by the opponents of reform often are designed to arouse and enlist emotions against reform? Is emotion a necessary ally in a

successful reform movement? Questions like these have helped me to rethink things I thought I understood. In the meantime, our emotion-laden reactions to modern life, when they involve consumer goods whose manufacture, use, and disposal contribute to environmental change, continue to literally remake the planet.

As an environmental historian, I see the connection between consumer behavior and environmental change as an opportunity to do some important explaining. But tackling big connections is not for the faint-hearted. Environmental historians have been among the least reticent scholars when it comes to crossing disciplinary boundaries. Yet, if we have crossed boundaries into many other fields, we often have limited ourselves to single forays into contiguous areas. There are practical scholarly reasons that argue against attempting more. It is hard enough to be an expert in one area and harder still in two. While most peers and grant-makers readily recognize the merit of making broader connections, when it comes to actually judging our work, the familiar standards of the monograph still prevail.

The obvious connection between consumer behavior and environmental change, regularly pointed out by environmentalists and readily recognized by all, poses a standing challenge to our scholarship. Consumer spending now accounts for two-thirds of global economic activity, making it one of the great levers for change in history. Yet most of us view a set of broad connections, not as an opportunity to make a useful contribution to better understanding how change has come to unfold as it has, but from the perspective of the high standards of the narrow historical monograph. With this frame uppermost in our minds, we beg off, pleading that we do not have the time to find and master all the sources relevant to the connections. (See preceding section on how emotions influence decision-making.) But if our professional standards make us reluctant to tackle important relationships, perhaps we need a separate standard for projects of this nature. Cronon was right. More big stories need to be told together, which means that more of us need to take the risk and give it a go, while trusting in the extra encouragement and support that our fellow environmental historians have always provided and that make our field emotionally rewarding as well as important.

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drunks, lampposts, and environmental history

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Future agendas in environmental history will be set fairly democratically, by the hundreds of scholars

deciding what to work on and how to do it. To some extent, of course, those decisions will be shaped by the examples of admired scholars or by the siren call of paths of least resistance. McNeill proposes what he would like to see happen within environmental history and not what he expects to see. He says that the most urgent duty of environmental history is to abandon the shelter of ivory towers for the blood-spattered arena of public discourse and the dangerous task of infiltrating the corridors of power.

Full Text (1207 words)

Copyright Environmental History Jan 2005

FUTURE AGENDAS in environmental history will be set fairly democratically, by the hundreds of scholars deciding what to work on and how to do it. To some extent, of course, those decisions will be shaped by the examples of admired scholars or by the siren call of paths of least resistance. But young people are often keen to do things differently from their elders, and often inclined to seek rather than shun the difficult paths-as they should be. Nonetheless, we elders (I am 49) are rarely reluctant to try to set agendas-nor should we be, as long as we do not mind much when our suggestions are ignored.

What I propose here is what I would like to see happen within environmental history, not what I expect to see. Mine is an academic agenda only, although in these parlous times I am more tempted than ever to suggest, as I trust others will, that the most urgent duty of environmental history is to abandon the shelter of ivory towers for the blood-spattered arena of public discourse and the dangerous task of infiltrating the corridors of power.

My propositi on is twofold: first, that environmental history-by its very nature an interdisciplinary pursuit-should become still more so, and second, that it should strengthen its links to mainstream currents within the discipline of history. At first blush it will appear self-contradictory to call simultaneously for greater interdisciplinarity and stronger ties to a single discipline. I argue that this is not a contradiction, but a feasible and synergistic agenda.

Environmental history necessarily draws on and overlaps with several academic traditions. The frontier zones between environmental history and historical geography or historical ecology, for example, are murky regions with few established rules, middle grounds where profitable exchanges and unprofitable sniping coexist. Interdisciplinary work sometimes seems undisciplined, without clear methodology, or, as Marshall Sahlins once put it, a procedure by which one multiplies the uncertainties of one's own discipline by those of several others. Allowing for the risks, I still think environmental historians should embrace interdisciplinarity more fully.

The reason for embracing interdisciplinarity, risks and all, is simple: That is where we are most likely to find something new. For more than a century academics in general have behaved like the drunk searching for his car keys beneath the lamppost, not because that is where he lost them but because that is where the light is. Academic knowledge and inquiry remain structured by the disciplines that arose in German universities in the nineteenth century. They shone powerful beams of light that were very illuminating for a long time. But over time, as more and more of that which could be found within the beams was found, they became progressively less useful as a means of generating new insight. Researchers reached points of diminishing returns, but often preferred meager returns to the risks of searching in the darkness between the beams. Nowadays, the most exciting and rewarding fields, such as brain science or global-change science, are ones that span the traditional disciplines. Environmental history is admirably well positioned to redirect the light into the murk, to the benefit of all.

Environmental historians can search between the beams in two ways. They can join or even organize teams of researchers including specialists in, say, geoarcheology, palynology, and dendrochronology. This has obvious merit in assuring higher standards of expertise, but often produces inchoate or unreadable results.' There are practical and institutional obstacles to coalition building as well. The other way is to hew to the lone-wolf traditions of historians and try to make sense of other disciplines oneself. This has the opposite risks and rewards: It is more likely to yield coherence, but reduces

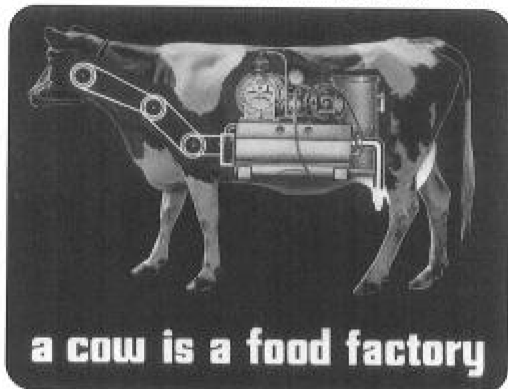
expertise, except in cases of the most remarkable polymaths blessed with generous colleagues. There is probably no reliably right or wrong way to do this: Perhaps different problems, different inquiries, are best confronted with different strategies.

While fear of the interdisciplinary darkness carries its risks, straying too far from the central concerns of one's disciplines carries others. Paradoxically, it is by invigorating results with interdisciplinary methods that environmental history can speak most compellingly to the discipline of history as a whole, and escape the sorry fate of overspecialized sub-disciplines: neglect. Exploration of environmental evidence can help illuminate traditional and current concerns of historians, ranging from matters of war and statecraft to the workings of the family.

With risk comes opportunity. Environmental historians can help rejuvenate historical research in general by serving as diplomats reporting from other terrains, exploring information that lies beyond the borders of text-bound historians. In particular, environmental history can use new varieties of evidence brought to light by natural scientists but not used by them for historians' purposes. Geomorphologists can tell us that one-half of the soil erosion in the German lands over the past millennium took place in a few weeks in the summer of 1342, but do not readily make connections between that catastrophe and the Black Death, which is of no concern to them. Geneticists can tell us that Yersinia pestis, the bacillus that causes bubonic plague, is a mere 1,500 years old in its current genetic form, but do not easily recognize the significance of that finding for the reign of Justinian, of which geneticists probably (I haven't verified this) know little. Microbiologists can tell us from skeletal teeth what previous human generations ate, and something about their mortality and fertility patterns, but do not connect these data to the demographic and family historiography that has developed over the past forty years.2 Environmental historians are well placed to serve the interests of the historical profession as a whole by filing reports from the geo-archives and bio-archives created by natural scientists.

Exploring these technically complex frontiers may seem daunting to those of us with limited scientific educations. But I hope and expect the modern university will make it feasible for young scholars to equip themselves with the necessary skills, or to make the necessary connections and build the requisite scholarly networks, to pursue this agenda. For in finding new ways to speak to old concerns, environmental history can protect itself from that curse of success in intellectual life, the ghettoization of an otherwise successful specialization.

Frame 10 from a WWII Filmstrip, "More Milk for Victory," 1942.



Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-91070-ZB.

Environmental historians have studied the machine as a metaphor for nature, the factory as the site of disassembly of animal bodies and reshaping of human bodies, and the changing nature of both human and animal bodies. In an age of factory farms and genetic engineering, how might we consider the ways all of those themes come together in cultural understandings of nature?

Enlarge 200%
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Frame 10 from a WWII Filmstrip, "More Milk for Victory," 1942.

[Footnote]

NOTES

1. A recent exception is Agustí Esteban Amat, ed., La humanización de las altas cuencas de la Garona y las Nogueras (4500 aC-1955dC) (Madrid: Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, 2004), which treats millennia of environmental history in the eastern Pyrenees using every variety of source imaginable.

2. Some details on these matters appear in J. R. McNeill, "Observation on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History," History and Theory 42 (2004): 39-41; for the erosion of 1342, see Hans-Rudolf Bork and Gabriele Schmidtchen, "Böden: Entwicklung, Zerstörung und Schutzbedarf in Deutschland," Geographische Rundschau 53 (2001): 5-9.

[Author Affiliation]

J. R. McNeill is professor of history and holder of the Cinco Hermanos Chair of Environmental and International Affairs in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. He is the author of Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-century World (Norton, 2000), and co-author of The Human Web: A Bird's-eye View of World History (Norton, 2003).

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the agency of nature or the nature of agency?

Linda Nash. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 67-69 (3 pp.)

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Author(s): Linda Nash

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Abstract (Document Summary)

What underpins the study of history is the notion of human agency, the ability of people to act intentionally to shape their worlds. Nash talks about environmental historians' argument that nature too has agency, and this claim often has been met with skepticism. After all, the argument goes, although nature may resist and complicate human actions, producing all sorts of unintended consequences, nature has neither the intentionality nor the choice that humans do.

Full Text (1220 words)

Copyright Environmental History Jan 2005

WHAT UNDERPINS the study of history is the notion of human agency, the ability of people to act intentionally to shape their worlds. When modern historical scholarship emerged in the nineteenth century, it recounted the ability of European male elites to shape political and intellectual arrangements. With the rise of social history after World War II, historians sought to demonstrate that intentionality and purposive action were not solely the preserve of the powerful. In short, the premise underlying social history was the belief that agency resides in all human beings-not only elite European men, but Native Americans, women, workers, colonized peoples, slaves. More recently, environmental

After all, the argument goes, although nature may resist and complicate human actions, producing all sorts of unintended consequences, nature has neither the intentionality nor the choice that humans do. Nature may constitute a dynamic structure, but it is not an agent. Human beings alone are the motor of history.1

I agree that there is a problem when environmental historians assert an "agency" for nature, but it is not that we are confusing agency and structure. Rather, the problem is that we have not overtly challenged common assumptions about human agency. What are these assumptions? Typically, the agency of human beings is distinguished by our ability to convert ideas into purposeful actions. Thus while it is not only human action that alters the world, human action remains unique. To invoke a classic example, while a bee can build a hive, the bee cannot envision the hive prior to its building. The bee just builds, whereas the human is presumed to think and then build. The bee is not an agent, while the architect clearly is.2 This assertion locates agency in the human mind, separating it from both the body and the non-human environment.

But what if, instead of following the model of social history and insisting on the "agency of nature," environmental historians followed those scholars who insist on the need to think about agency in altogether different terms. To give but two examples, Bruno Latour, in his studies of modern scientists and engineers, has maintained that agency is better understood as something that is dispersed among humans and non-humans in what he terms "actor-networks."3 Tim Ingold, an anthropologist, has argued that our point of departure for social analysis should be the organism-in-its-environment rather than the self-contained individual confronting an external world. This perspective, he suggests, allows usto overcome the dichotomy between evolution and history, biology and culture.

Environmental historians are uniquely positioned to contribute to this rethinking and rewriting of agency because we study the interactions of humans and the non-human world in such detail. And what we often uncover is not merely the way that nature influences and constrains human actions, but also the way that particular environments shape human intentions. What I want to suggest, following Ingold, is that the bee/architect metaphor does not hold. It is through practical engagement with the world, not disembodied contemplation, that human beings develop their plans. Let me use the example of tidewater rice cultivation in colonial Georgia, drawing on the work of Mart Stewart.4

Viewed from a distance, a tidewater rice plantation resembled, in the words of one planter, "a huge hydraulic machine," a rational design that humans had imposed on nature. But Stewart immediately complicates that perception. No overarching plan ever existed for tidewater rice cultivation on the southeastern coast; in fact, no one is quite sure how the system originated in America (although west African slaves probably brought many of the techniques). But certainly for those who found themselves in this location, both slaves and planters, the characteristics of the Georgia landscape suggested certain alternatives. To put it simply, tidewater rice cultivation could be imagined on the Georgia coast but not in the Colorado desert. Actual methods, moreover, hardly comprised a unified system; they were idiosyncratic and often ad hoc. Many actions undoubtedly emerged spontaneously in the fields, and only later were they passed on as "ideas" or "expertise." What we might label planters' (or slaves') "intentions" were always under adjustment. In other words, it was not merely the particular techniques of rice cultivation but the very ability to envision those techniques that emerged when planters and slaves interacted with the tidewater lowlands.

I am not advocating some variant of environmental determinism here. To the contrary, the development of rice plantations was always contingent upon the shiftingpresence of certain human and non-human elements. Nor am I suggesting that there is no difference between the ways that humans and bees inhabit the world. But the notion of a human "agent" and all that it implies is, like environmental determinism, too simple to describe what took place. Even if agency is always constrained by "structure," the very idea of agency concentrates a vast amount of power in a supposedly rational center, while constructing nonhuman elements as always external and secondary. What I would like to suggest is the possibility of writing environmental histories in a way that critically foregrounds the issue of agency, rather than taking it for granted.

But does this really matter? Timothy Mitchell has argued that by failing to put human agency into

question, the telling of history helps reproduce familiar forms of power, particularly the power of technical expertise.5 If we study the emergence of tidewater rice plantations, or genetically engineered crops, as outcomes-however unintended and constrained-of an exclusively human agency, our narratives themselves contribute to the separation between ideas and their objects. We imply that some kind of universal reason exists apart from the material world, and that history is (still) the story of (western) reason's gradual unfolding.

Thus, perhaps, environmental history should strive not merely to put nature into history, but to put the human mind back in the world. Perhaps our narratives should emphasize that human intentions do not emerge in a vacuum, that ideas often cannot be clearly distinguished from actions, that so-called human agency cannot be separated from the environments in which that agency emerges. It is worth considering how our stories might be different if human beings appeared not as the motor of history but as partners in a conversation with a larger world, both animate and inanimate, about the possibilities of existence. If that is one of our goals, then social history is not our model, and longstanding assumptions about "structure" and "agency" will not suffice.

[Footnote]
NOTES
1. See the discussion between William H. Sewell, Jr. and Ted Steinberg at http://historycooperative.press.uiuc.edu/phorum/read.php?f=13&i=5&t=5#reply_5.
2. The example is from Karl Marx; however, I come to it via Tim Ingold, The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill (New York: Routledge, 2000).
3. Bruno Latour, Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
4. Mart A. Stewart, "What Nature Suffers to Groe": Life, Labor, and Landscape on the Georgia Coast, 1680-1920 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).
5. Timothy Mitchell, Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

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is environmental history a subfield of garden history?

Philip J Pauly. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 70-71 (2 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Pauly discusses the history of horticulture, which currently refers to more or less ornamental leisure activities. But as Abigail Lustig has emphasized, in the 19th century it was a scientifically,

technologically, and socially fundamental and broad-ranging activity. Horticulture was not primarily about flowers, but rather about food plants, landscape design, and biogeographic transformation.

Full Text (863 words)

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AS SOMEONE WHO was trained and has worked primarily in history of science rather than in environmental history, I am not in a good position to critique the latter field, or even to declare that a broad direction of work is "new." What I do see, primarily within the American context, is a combination of topics, sources, and perspectives that are important in themselves, understudied, and potentially valuable for improving our understanding of the history of relations between humans and other organisms.

The subject is horticulture. That term currently refers to more or less ornamental leisure activities. But as Abigail Lustig has emphasized, in the nineteenth century it was a scientifically, technologically, and socially fundamental and broad-ranging activity.1 Horticulture was not primarily about flowers, but rather about food plants, landscape design, and biogeographic transformation. In the North American context, horticulturists were particularly important, for better or worse, as agents of plant mobility. They imported species from other continents, and they also shuffled the distributions of North American plants. Some of these, such as sorghum and soybeans, were cultivars that transformed rural landscapes and the agricultural economy; others-notably grasses and forbs, but also such woody types as tamarisk, melaleuca, and black locust-spread on their own in different parts of the continent.2

In 1872, the Nebraska nursery owner and future Secretary of Agriculture J. Sterling Morton named his proposed tree-planting holiday "Arbor Day" rather than "Sylvan Day" because his primary interest was in trees, not forests. We know much less about "tree" people such as Morton, Charles S. Sargent, or David Fairchild, than about "forest" figures like Gifford Pinchot. Extensive material is available for studying them and other horticulturists: Specialized magazines began with The New England Farmer and Horticultural Register in the 1820s; nearly every state published (sometimes with verbatim transcripts) the transactions of meetings of horticultural societies; federal, state, and local agencies generated reports and archives; there are scattered but detailed nursery catalogs and herbarium records. How, exactly, did plants move? How were horticultural exchanges structured? What were the relations between native landscape designers like F. L. Olmsted and immigrant plantsmen?3 How did (some) aspects of horticulture become feminized? What were the roles of professors? How conscious were horticulturists of the transformations they were effecting? What were the relations between intentions and results? These questions are all answerable, to a considerable degree, through research.

From the perspective I am outlining, the central figure in the development of thinking about people and landscapes in the early twentieth century was not John Mu ir, but Liberty Hyde Bailey. No one has studied Bailey in depth since the 1950s; Ben Minteer's work breaks new ground.4 Bailey's conviction that activities ranging from poetry and philosophizing to the production of reference works and herbaria all fit within the compass of a vitalized enterprise of horticulture should be taken seriously; the question then is to understand what happened to that identity as different elements were taken up and transformed by nature writers, nurserymen, breeders, and botanists.

The largest issue here-one that interfaces with central debates among environmental historians during the last decade-is the history of "culture." In the United States in the nineteenth century this was not primarily a noun referring either to literature or to group behavior, but rather a verb denoting the use of intelligence to foster livingthings. Cotton culture, strawberry culture, and mental culture were linked concepts; high culture was not sweetness and light, but manure, hand weeding, and controlled pollination. What then was culture is now biotechnology.

Fruitful conversations can occur between environmental historians and a number of other groups regarding the history of horticulture. Engagement with historians of science and technology, and with

ecologists and botanists, is straightforward and ongoing. The real benefit could come from interaction with garden historians, the scholars who have attended most carefully to past vegetational design. The implication of work by Marcus Hall is that environmental history may potentially become a subfield of garden history.5 In 2002, when asked to organize an informal session at the ASEH annual meeting, I proposed that question for discussion. The idea was discouraged, and the discussion did not take place. It remains an issue worth both puckish and serious consideration.

[Footnote]
NOTES
1. Abigail J. Lustig, "Cultivating Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century English Gardens," Science in Context 13 (2000): 155-81.
2. R. N. Mack and M. Erneberg, "The United States Naturalized Flora: Largely the Product of Deliberate Introductions," Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden 89 (2002): 17689.
3. Franziska Kirchner, Der Central Park in New York, und der Einfluß der deutschen Gartentheorie und praxis auf seine Gestaltung (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 2002).
4. Ben A. Minteer, The Landscape of Reform (Cambridge: MIT Press, forthcoming).
5. Marcus Hatfield Hall, "American Nature, Italian Culture: Restoring the Land in Two Continents," (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1999).

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Philip J. Pauly is professor of history at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. Publications include Biologists and the Promise of American Life: From Meriwether Lewis to Alfred Kinsey (Princeton University Press, 2000); "Fighting the Hessian Fly: American and British Responses to Insect Invasion, 1776-1789," Environmental History 7 (July 2002): 377-400; and Fruits and Plains: Horticulture and the Meaning of America (forthcoming).

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environmental history without historians

Steve Pyne. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 72-74 (3 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Pyne probes the future of environmental history. He says that it will be the next generation of practitioners make of it. It will emerge from their felt sense of nature, and it will arise out of the urgings, overt or implied, of their professional colleagues.

Full Text (1075 words)

Copyright Environmental History Jan 2005

WHAT IS the future of environmental history?

It will be what the next generation of practitioners make of it. It will emerge from their felt sense of nature, and it will arise out of the urgings, overt or implied, of their professional colleagues. I can't speak for the first. I would disappointed if the same themes persisted, leading to a dreary scholasticism of thesis, counterthesis, and revisionisms, burdening future generations with the intellectual equivalent of debt peonage. But in the matter of professional settings, I can comment.

When ASEH members speak of "environmental history," they mean history done by professional historians, typically in the Academy, but perhaps on detached duty as public historians. The environment, however, attracts a great many scholars, and increasingly they are conceiving the subject in historical terms. Anthropologists, geographers, archeologists, foresters-all are incorporating, or rediscovering, the valence between history and nature. Even ecology is becoming (if grudgingly) a historical science, rather like geology. Each group defines the topic in its own way, indifferent to the methodological sound and fury of the others. Collectively, they challenge environmental history; they complement it; and they offer opportunities for scholarly colonization.

Regarding our status within academic history, I won't speak. My sense is that the tug of political and social issues will, like the ring of Sauron, pull powerfully against our fellowship. I know I couldn't make it work. Instead, I transferred into what has become a School of Life Sciences (SoLS), specifically a Human Dimensions Faculty (the Lost SoLS).

What has my experience been? In recent decades, critics have dismissed C. P. Snow's "two cultures" argument. All my experience suggests he was right; not on his quirky particulars, but in his broad appreciation that the sciences and the humanities operate very differently. They do. The growth of the sciences depends on research, that of the humanities on teaching. The fundamental unit of scientific inquiry is the funded project, of which a published article is but one product. The sciences are revenue sources, the humanities, revenue sinks. For every NSF grant someone in SoLS gets, ASU adds a 54 percent surcharge. For every NEH fellowship someone in the History Department gets, the university loses money. As even public universities become more privatized, the scramble for external funding wedges the two castes further apart.

But the difference is also one of style. By training and temperament, scientists are problem-solvers. Academic historians are problem-illuminators, although they seem to pride themselves recently on being simple problematizers. The sciences are moving rapidly toward multidisciplinary collaborations; they enthusiastically team-teach; they are willing to include within their congregation whoever might contribute. What they hope to get, especially, is help on data, policy, and ethics. How this contributes to history qua history, they care little, any more than historians might fret over the complexities of Bayesian statistics. For postmodern babble and the sneering ironist, they have only scorn.

Historians may look covetously at the Academy's scientists. They see higher profiles, reduced teaching loads, the gravitational distortion of external monies. They don't see the hard discipline of experimental research, the amount of collaborative work in lab and field with both graduates and undergraduates, or the ferocious competition to win grants and fund students. (When completed, the reorganized SoLS expects, on average, every member to bring in $300,000 a year in external funding.) Without preconditioning, most historians, I wager, would buckle under the strain. Last year I was awarded a Regents' Professorship, the highest honor the university can bestow, yet barely scraped to an average ranking among my SoLS colleagues. What saves me is that I understand enough science to speak with our other faculties (save the molecular crowd, which lives in an alternative universe); that I have a credible background in the history of science; and that I came into SoLS already tenured.

IN THE SPRING of 1992, my wife and I decided to kill our TV. We thus cut ourselves off from vast swathes of American society. Evening news, sports, politics, popular culture-they all went. It was like pushing out to sea on a raft, watching the coast and then the headlands recede until only an

occasional cloud might show on the horizon.

Transferring to SoLS has had a similar effect. I read less of history as history, and its intra-disciplinary concerns seem ever more insubstantial. When a colleague in environmental ethics suggested we team-teach a course on American conservation for the Conservation Biology program, we started out with a syllabus informed historically, and ended with a course on "themes." When urged to identify a funded project, I turned to a biological theory of fire, and rounded up collaborators among ecologists interested in carbon cycling, insects and grasses, and infectious diseases, and an ecological economist, a crack mathematician I hope to recruit for modeling. Such is the power of social osmosis.

The environmental sciences need environmental historians. Recently at a fire workshop sponsored by the Canadian Forest Service, I listened to a conference call from the Associate Deputy Minister in Ottawa, an economist, deeply impressed by a simulation model that suggested that more water bombers would not improve the ability to control wildfire, but worried over the assumptions behind the model. I pointed out that there was no need for simulation. History provided plenty of empirical examples that illustrated precisely this message. For groups, however, that view history only as archival and bardic-concerned with preserving records and celebrating the great deeds of the clan-the thought that the past might hold useful evidence was epiphanal. They have little experience of history applied as an analytical instrument. They need our thick description of how things came to be as they are, and our capacity to evoke context and contingency.

Yet I think, equally, that environmental historians need the environmental sciences. We need their vigor, their ability to focus, their methodological skepticism-and their hiring. We should be training young scholars to serve in such capacities, as we have trained public historians. The trick will be, having dispatched them from the metropole, to maintain amongthose scattered colonials a continuing commonwealth of scholarship.

That, of course, is why we need the ASEH.

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[Photograph]
Flag Day, Pittsburgh, Pa., 1941.

[Author Affiliation]
A former North Rim Longshot, Steve Pyne is now a professor in the Human Dimensions Faculty, School of Life Sciences, Arizona State University, and the authorof sixteen books, most recently Smokechasing (Arizona, 2003) and Tending Fire (Shearwater Books, 2004). He is working on a fire history of Canada.

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discipline and indiscipline

Harriet Ritvo. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 75-76 (2 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Ritvo shares why environmental history is currently perceived as embracing not only a wide range of topics, but also, somewhat paradoxically, a wide range of disciplines. Among other things, new topics have not displaced the old--there is still plenty of work to do, and plenty of good work being done in those areas. And if some of the varied current range of environmental history is adventitious or superficial--the result of a natural inclination among academics to hitch their scholarly wagons to a field that seems energetic and expanding--much of it represents a real enhancement of the field.

Full Text (858 words)

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THINKING ABOUT where environmental history might or should be heading is a formidable assignment. But perhaps it is not quite formidable enough. That is, the editorial request which produced these brief essays was formulated in a way that tacitly assumes ("direction," "heading") that environmental history has developed and will continue to be developed as a unified cohesive subdiscipline. This may have been the case in its earliest days (although all origin stories merit careful scrutiny). It is certainly not the case any more. Both the topics of papers presented at the annual ASEH meetings, where disciplinary boundaries are policed by the program committee, and those of the books submitted for the annual Marsh Prize, where authors (or their publishers) classify themselves, suggest that environmental history is currently perceived as embracing not only a wide range of topics, but also, somewhat paradoxically, a wide range of disciplines. An unevenly spreading blob might better represent this situation than a targeted monodirectional arrow.

This image may be inelegant, but it is not meant to be unappreciative-or even unflattering. On the contrary, one of the most attractive features of environmental history is its potential for synthesis and inclusion. I know that there exists some regret for a past golden age of the field when its focus was sharper and its boundaries better defined-when scholarship tended to converge on topics like the frontier and regions like the American West. But such regret is misplaced. New topics have not displaced the old-there is still plenty of work to do, and plenty of good work being done in those areas. And if some of the varied current range of environmental history is adventitious or superficial-the result of a natural inclination among academics to hitch their scholarly wagons to a field that seems energetic and expanding-much of it represents a real enhancement of the field.

Particularly encouraging is the tendency toward geographical inclusiveness, or at least diversity. Of course the United States is a big important place, in terms of environmental history as well as in many other ways, but it is not the only place. It is connected to other places by land and by sea, as well as by economics, politics, and culture. Within this country, there are strong institutional reasons, based in the development of the field and also in the training and hiring of academic historians, for the preponderance of Americanists in history departments, and of American topics in environmental history. And "American" has generally been subject to strict construction; for example, in most practical

situations, "North American" is not seen either as synonymous with it or as subsuming it. The 4gth Parallel sometimes seems more permeable to the feet (or paws or hooves) of earthbound wanderers, than to the unfettered imaginations of historians. This is not to say that American environmental (and other) historians who have chosen to focus on their own society have been idiosyncratically parochial; the historical institutions of many other nations reflect parallel inclinations and commitments. It is probably a natural human trait to be more interested in the local (however large) than in the remote (however near). The benefits of such concentration are manifold and manifest. But like every choice, it also has costs.

Fortunately, the countervailing pull has become especially strong for environmental historians, in whose research the human and the non-human are so profoundly intermingled. Regulation and exploitation are largely matters of culture and politics, of course, but many topics in environmental history flow more readily over national borders, as is well illustrated by much excellent work exploring the connections between environment and empires, new world and otherwise. Willingness to look beyond borders has also led historians to focus on features-like plants, animals, topography, and climate-that are less immediately defined by them. So T hope that the emerging tendency to see environmental history in a regional and even global terms will continue-and I am grateful for the recent compendious contexts provided by such scholars as John Richards (The Unending Frontier-California, 2003) and Steven Mithen (After the Ice-Harvard, 2004).

Political and cultural boundaries can constrain our choice of approach as well as our choice of topics-constraints that are at least equally powerful, although less obvious. For example, heavily freighted terms like "frontier" and "nature" have very different valences even in other anglophone historical traditions; it can be bracing to learn how they look to other people. Recent ASEH conferences have been increasingly global from a prosopographical perspective, as well as from a thematic one. Such trends signal continuing openness to developments in d ifferent places (and also, to make a point for which there is really no room here, in such allied disciplines as the history of science). They provide a salutary counterbalance to the vigorous institutionalization that is also an indication of the health of environmental history.

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Document 18 of 29

the business-environment connection

Christine Meisner Rosen. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 77-79 (3 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Rosen shares why it is an opportunity to try to persuade the readers of Environmental History of the urgent importance of engaging in research that integrates business and environmental history. In her view it is essential that environmental historians join with business historians in investigating the historical interface between business and the environment. One needs to do this not only because the subject is intrinsically interesting, but also because it promises to provide crucial insights into the origins of the mounting environmental and public-health crises that loom before the people.

Full Text (1500 words)

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I WOULD LIKE to take this opportunity to try to persuade the readers of Environmental History of the urgent importance of engaging in research that integrates business and environmental history. In my view it is essential that environmental historians join with business historians in investigating the historical interface between business and the environment. We need to do this not only because the subject is intrinsically interesting, but also because it promises to provide crucial insights into the origins of the mounting environmental and public-health crises that loom before us.

As Christopher Sellers and I pointed out several years ago in a similar call directed at business historians, despite decades of increasing alarm about industrial pollution, climate change, rainforest destruction, species extinction, and all the other forms of environmental degradation linked to economic activity, surprisingly little in-depth research has focused specifically on the relationship between the history of business and the evolution of the natural environmenteither by environmental or business historians.' Business historians have been especially oblivious. Blinded by the internal, corporate organizational concerns of the Chandlerian perspective that dominated the field until very recently, the vast majority have simply ignored the environmental context in which the modern corporation has evolved. Environmental historians are doing better, especially since the early 1990s, due in large part to the heroic efforts of Bill Cronon and others to extend the boundaries of the field beyond its longstanding focus on wilderness, forests, and agriculture. While the new work coming out is extremely interesting and important, however, we have only begun to scratch the surface of this important subject. Much of the new work by environmental historians focuses on business's impact on the environment, especially its negative impacts, without looking at the impact the natural environment has had on the evolution of business. More detrimentally, with a few notable exceptions, it tends to treat business as a blackbox, as an inherently exploitative force, (or as my teenage son might put it, as "the black box of DOOM!!"), rather than as a living system whose internal dynamics and constraints need to be explored and analyzed if we are to truly understand how the two systems-nature and business-have interacted and coevolved over time.2

To integrate the history of business into our study of the natural world, we need to recognize that business and nature are inseparable parts of a single interactive system, an "industrial ecosystem," through which energy and materials cycle continuously, from nature to industry and back to nature, in a never-ending feedback loop.3 The business system feeds on the natural resources found in the earth and on energy ultimately derived from the sun, as well as on the manufactured inputs of industrial supply chains. It returns its wastes to the earth, the seas, and the atmosphere. These two-way flows take place whenever industry extracts materials and energy from the earth and processes them into manufactured goods, whenever it ships and sells the goods, and whenever consumers use and ultimately dispose of them. At every step of the cycle-not just the final, end-user disposal step-the flow-through includes a great deal of energy and material waste. Indeed, according to recent research, only a small fraction of the material that flows into the U.S. economy today gets bound up into manufactured products. As much as 96 percent is waste-mine waste, stuff that blows out the factory smokestack or effluent pipe as pollution or that is left behind on the factory floor and dumped in landfills. Most of the products are disposed of as waste as well, rather than recycled.4 We know

startlingly little about how these proportions compare to the materials and energy flows that shaped our industrial ecosystem in the past-or anything else about them for that matter.

What we need to do to fill the void in our knowledge is multifold. We need to research and explain the historical evolution of the mutual interdependencies between business and the biological ecosystems, landscapes, climates, and materials cycles (e.g. water, carbon, nitrogen) of our planet. Equally important, if we are ever to fully understand the industrial ecosystem system as a whole, we must peel back the layers of the black box at its center. We must investigate, in depth, the business institutions, organizational structures, market forces, public policies, personality factors, cultural forces, and all the other internal and external dynamics and constraints that shaped the flows of capital, the management decision making, and the activities of the workers and the legions of consumers that have determined how the business system has interacted with the natural world over time. It is imperative that we investigate all aspects of this interaction, rather than limit ourselves to the study of the environmental depredations of industry. We need to conduct this research with an open mind, attuned to the ways in which the managers of business differed in their interactions with the environment, both within and across industries and over time, struggling to reduce waste, solve pollution problems, and deal positively with other forms of degradation, as well as exploiting the opportunities for profit and ignoring, failing to properly understand, or covering up the problems. You may wonder, isn't this a job for business historians? Of course it is. But it is also the stuff of environmental history. As Donald Worster once pointed out, "Wherever the two spheres, the natural and the cultural, interact with one another, environmental history finds its essential themes."5 Business is nothing if not an institution of human culture, at the nexus between the economy and the natural world.

This work will take us in directions that may be new to many environmental historians: into research in corporate archives, published and unpublished legal and economic records, the trade-waste literature of industrial and sanitary engineers, the records of the public-health profession, as well as the host of other materials that provide insight into business, public policy, and consumer culture. It is my hope that it will enable us to generate historical understandings and insights that will help business managers, government policy makers, and the public develop better strategies for dealing with the many environmental and public-health challenges our industrial society faces as a result of our problematic relationship with the natural world.

[Footnote]
NOTES
1. Christine Meisner Rosen and Christopher Sellers, "The Nature of the Firm: Towards an Eco-cultural History of Business," Business History Review (Winter 1999): 577-600. See also Jeffrey Stine and Joel Tarr, "At the Intersection of Histories: Technology and the Environment," Technology and Culture 39 (1998): 601-40.
2. The most well-known exception is William Cronon, Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991). Others include David Stradling and Joel A. Tarr, "Environmental Activism, Locomotive Smoke, and the Corporate Response: The case of the Pennsylvania Railroad and Chicago's Smoke Control," Business History Review (Winter 1999): 677-704; Hugh S. Gorman, Redefining Efficiency: Pollution Concerns, Regulatory Mechanisms, and Technological Change in the U.S. Petroleum Industry (Akron, Ohio: University of Akron Press, 2001); Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner, Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press and The Millbank Memorial Fund 2002); Craig E. Colton and Peter N. Skinner, The Road to Love Canal: Managing Waste before Love Canal (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); John K. Smith, "Turning Silk Purses into Sows' Ears: Environmental History and the Chemical Industry," Enterprise and Society1 (December 2000): 785-12; Terrence Kehoe and Charles Jacobson, "Environmental Decision Making and DDT Production at Montrose Chemical Corporation of California" Enterprise and Society 4 (December 2003): 640-75; and Carl Zimring, "Dirty Work: How Hygiene and Xenophobia Marginalized the American Waste Trades, 1870-1930," Environmental History 9 (January 2004): 80-101.
3. The industrial ecosystem concept comes from the field of industrial ecology. For more information, see Christine Meisner Rosen, "Industrial Ecology and the Greening of Business History," Business and Economic History 26 (Fall 1997): 123-37; and Christine Meisner Rosen, "Industrial Ecology and the Transformation of Corporate Environmental Management: A Business Historian's Perspective," in Inventing for the Environment, ed. Arthur Molella and Joyce Bed (Cambridge: MIT Press in association with the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 2003), 318-38.
4. Robert U. Ayres and Alien V. Kneese, "Externalities, Economics, and Thermodynamics," in Economy and

Ecology: Towards Sustainable Development, ed. F. Archibugi and P. Nijkamp (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 109-17; Gil Friend, "Sustainability Indicators: The Simple, Sobering and Significant," Greenbiz, June 2004,
http://www.greenbiz.com./news/columns_third.cfm?NewsID=26733&CFID=155087
72&CFTOKEN=15066082>. see also Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, and L. Hunter Lovins, Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1999).
5. Donald Worster, "Toward an Agroecological Perspective in History," Journal of American History 76 (March 1990): 1090.

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science and environmental history

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Since its inception, environmental history has embraced science as a tool because it provides a useful way to understand nature. In some cases, historians have explicitly demoted science by asserting that it is just another cultured way of knowing. In others, historians have asserted the importance of science in introductions but then relied little on it in the text. Russell focuses on potential reasons for this pattern and suggests ways to change it.

Full Text (1401 words)

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SINCE ITS INCEPTION, environmental history has embraced science as a tool because it provides a useful way to understand nature. Donald Worster has been one of the most forceful advocates for this strategy; a seminal essay he published in 1984 carries the title "History as Natural History."' But a look at environmental histories reveals that science's role is smaller than we might expect. In some cases, historians have explicitly demoted science by asserting that it is "just another cultured way of knowing." In others, historians have asserted the importance of science in introductions but then relied little on it in the text. This pattern is unfortunate because it means our analyses are not as informed and rich as they could be. This essay focuses on potential reasons for this pattern and suggests ways to change

it.2

First, science's demotion. Science's star has fallen among historians as cultural studies, postmodernism, and science studies have risen in prominence. These approaches have undermined the claim that science provides objective truth. To some extent this criticism has been valid, for objectivity may be an admirable goal but a deuced hard one to achieve (if we can even define it). But to some extent the criticism has tilted at straw men and women. The view of scientists as monolithic, hidebound, and unaware of the social nature of their endeavor is rooted more in popular perception than in science itself. The scientists of my acquaintance are keenly aware that society shapes science, if for no other reason than because they rely on government grants to fund their research.

But their appreciation is deeper than that. One of the first readings assigned in my first graduate ecology course was Thomas Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, the book that popularized the idea that science underwent radical paradigm shifts as new ideas replaced old.3 It was no great leap to recognize that, if Kühn was right, today's theories would be overthrown in the future-an effort in which the professor encouraged us to enroll. Another professor emphasized that everything he learned in graduate school about the most basic "facts" of plant physiology had since been found faulty. In seminars, graduate students and faculty in science critique the work of the famous and not-so-famous with as much fervor as historians.

So scientists are keen (whether because of intellectual curiosity or careerism) to come up with ideas that challenge accepted theories and "facts." They see revision of current understanding not as a flaw but as the goal of their work. At the same time, they demand rigorous testing of ideas against data, which undermines the claim that science is "just another cultured way of knowing." It is cultured, it tries to be objective but falls short, and scientists are as prone to failings as other people. But using "just" fails to credit science's higher standard of evidence compared to some other ways of knowing. We should not accept scientific ideas uncritically, nor should we dismiss them out of hand. Instead, we should recognize the trove of knowledge about the natural world science has created and use it with the same critical distance we apply to other sources.

If we accept the idea that we should use science, why do we not always follow through? This takes us to practical barriers. The most important seems to be the perception that science is beyond historians, either because of a lack of talent or lack of training. It is true that science demands more quantitative skill than does history, that such talent is distributed unevenly in the population, and that more than one historian has emerged from schooling with a sense of not having stood at the front of the line when the knack for numbers was handed out.

The talent barrier appears higher than it is for three reasons. First, once thrust into science, some humanists learn they have more skill than they thought. second, not all science demands high quantitative skill. Two disciplines of great use to environmental historians, biology and chemistry, encompass fields that rely little on mathematics above the high school-level. Courses in animal and plant taxonomy, for example, are accessible to anyone with the willingness to learn names of families, genera, species, and anatomical parts. Third, historians need not finish at the top of the class. Many historians develop reading competence in foreign languages without becoming fluent speakers. The same principle applies to science, where mastering even the most basic ideas makes a big difference in understanding source material.

Here are some suggestions for graduate students (or even faculty, should they find the time) who think they lack the ability or time to study science.4 Not all of these suggestions will be suited to all students or programs, and students should make sure their advisors support their plans.

First, excuse yourself from grade anxiety. Take courses pass/fail or be prepared to accept lower grades than those to which you are accustomed. On search committees, T have yet to see a grade on an individual course outweigh the quality of an applicant's dissertation and teaching. second, start with undergraduate courses. If you need graduate credit, ask the professor whether you can enroll for the course as an independent study and write an extra paper. Community colleges offer introductory

courses at convenient hours and bargain prices, and they cater to students with a range of backgrounds and abilities. Third, find study partners, including among undergraduates. Collaborative learning is often more efficient than puzzling out answers to problem sets for yourself. Fourth, if space among required courses is tight, consider petitioning to replace some other requirement with a science course. Finally, take an introductory statistics course. The resulting knowledge has high leverage since statistics underpin findings across a range of fields relevant to environmental history, including ecology, evolution, public health, medicine, and the social sciences. Courses that emphasize practical statistics, rather than the mathematical theory behind techniques, are most accessible.5

A few modest steps like these should improve our field by enabling us to tap the pool of ideas, techniques, and data produced by science. Doing so would not threaten our independence as scholars or as a field so long as we exercise the same critical judgment we apply to any other set of ideas and sources. To the contrary, knowing more about science would increase our ability to evaluate such sources and write ever more sophisticated history.

[Footnote]
NOTES
1. Donald Worster, "History as Natural History: An Essay on Theory and Method," Pacific Historical Review 53 (February 1984): 1-19.
2. This essay builds on ideas in Edmund Russell, "Evolutionary History: Prospectus for a New Field," Environmental History 8 (April 2003): 204-28.
3. Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
4. These suggestions are drawn from my own experience. As an undergraduate English major, I evaded all but the minimum number of courses (three) in math and science. That evasion arose largely because I lacked confidence in my ability to compete against premedical students. After college, I worked as a volunteer in the Philippines, which piqued my interest in conservation and agriculture. Knowing more biology seemed important for doing anything effective in those fields, so I took science courses at community colleges before entering graduate school in ecology. It turned out there was no special gift necessary for success in science courses. Interest and hard work produced results as reliably in science as they did in the humanities. The single most useful course I took was statistics, because it enabled me to understand data across so many fields. Two factors led me to switch into history while in graduate school. First, I realized that the questions most fascinating to me would be answered better through history than through traditional biological research. second, I discovered environmental history, which offered an ideal way to bring together the humanities and science in an especially exciting way.
5. An excellent introductory text demonstrating this approach is Neil J. Salkind, Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics (London: Sage Publications, 2004).

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rooting around in search of causality

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Sabin shares why Raymond Williams' insight, which criticized the intellectual separation of economics and ecology, still speaks to how one defines environmental history and raises the question whether closer examination of political economy is in tension with the ecological emphasis of the field. Among other things, if one sees economics and ecology as inseparable, one may realize that a broader set of human activities are environmental than one previously recognized.

Full Text (1126 words)

Copyright Environmental History Jan 2005

IN HIS FREQUENTLY CITED 1980 essay on ideas of nature, Raymond Williams criticized the intellectual separation of economics and ecology, and called for the two disciplines to be brought together.' His insight still speaks to how we define environmental history and raises the question of whether closer examination of political economy is in tension with the ecological emphasis of the field.

If we see economics and ecology as inseparable, we may realize that a broader set of human activities are "environmental" than we previously recognized. Humans are living creatures that interact with the natural world through all that we produce and consume. When ants carry morsels into their anthills, we call that work ecology. When humans throw up skyscrapers, pocket cell phones, eat popcorn, or sit around in a meeting-that's ecology too. Some things we do, like driving cars, have greater consequences for the rest of the natural world than others. But each of our activities, however mundane, is ecological.

Some studies of economic production and consumption, such as William Cronon's account of the lumber industry in Nature's Metropolis, recognize this crucial insight and weave business and ecological analysis together. You can feel the heft of the ax and imagine the physicality of a log floating down stream. Cronon's microeconomic analysis is representative of how environmental history has led historians to rediscover the significance of business and political history, which had fallen out of favor in the history profession. Historians have found in their concern for environmental change a new reason to study the flow of commodities or the development of business enterprises and cities.

As we probe more deeply into the history of capitalism, however, we are discovering that many things that we don't think of as environmental have the most powerful determining impact on the land. The state of public education, as well as race and class relations in the United States, have pushed many families into the sprawling suburbs and edge cities of North America. Society's ability to manage social relationships and provide public amenities such as education or safety turn out to be extraordinarily potent drivers of environmental change, perhaps far more important than love for the single-family house, automobile, or suburban landscape. But how do we make sense of education or public safety as "environmental" issues?

The trend toward broadening our understanding of what is "environmental" has been embraced by environmental advocates today. The basic structures of modern capitalism, from international trade policy and financial institutions to agricultural and highway finance and American habits of consumption, are understood to be more powerful determinants of our relationship with nature than more clearly environmental activities, institutions, or legislation.

As with environmental activists seeking to rewrite international trade agreements, there are risks to

environmental historians broadening their scope to examine political and economic history. In telling interdisciplinary stories about environmental change, we could easily begin cherry-picking theories of political and economic change. Increasingly, however, our theories will conflict. Environmental historians then will have to resolve their differences through substantive debate not about forestry or farming, but over how the economy functions and the nature of political life in the United States or internationally. Additionally, as we tell stories about the significance of the International Monetary Fund or World Trade Organization, environmental historians inevitably will be pulled away from stories rooted in ecosystems toward narratives based in international finance and governance.

As a young scholar in the field, I have struggled with the question of whether the goal of environmental history should be to explain the root causes of historical environmental change in politics, economics, and culture, or instead to trace changes in the land and our changing relationship to the material world. I recently completed a history of the politics of the California oil market before World War II. In this study, which aimed at greater understanding of how government and politics have shaped our dependence on oil, I found it most fruitful to turn from petroleum's well-known environmental impacts toward the institutional and political factors that actually shaped the California oil market. Tailpipe emissions, sprawl, and oil spills may be the most evident symptoms of the oil economy, but they are just products of our dependence on petroleum. Our dependence resulted instead from cheap oil and an abundant highway infrastructure, and so I sought to understand what political factors influenced oil production and consumption.

My book thus explores conflicts over tax policy, property rights, highway finance, and regulation to explain the root causes of one of the most fundamental environmental transformations of the industrial era: the alteration of the earth's climate through soaring human use of fossil fuels. Given the book's overarching environmental concern, you can imagine my dismay when a leading environmental historian privately praised my study of political economy, but suggested that the book was not "environmental history" because it lacked a sufficiently ecological or nature-oriented perspective.

The comment highlights a major tension or contradiction facing the field of environmental history. My research on energy politics suggests that the gap between, on the one hand, telling histories of people and ecosystems and, on the other hand, actually explaining the forces transforming the world, threatens to grow over time, with uncertain implications for the discipline. If environmental historians want to identify the root causes of historical environmental change, they may have to forsake fields and streams for industrial politics and business competition. In my study of the California oil market, I have found, for instance, that trends in highway development often were determined by broader public struggles over public finance, with the protection of highway funds in the 19303 linked tightly to something as ostensibly non-environmental as the imposition of a new sales tax. Most environmental historians probably would see the general sales tax as a tax issue quite separate from anything to do with nature. But only by understanding how sales taxes were intertwined with gasoline taxes and perbarrel severance taxes on oil production can we get a full picture of how naturalresource extraction and highway development were promoted in California.

As we write about the past, we need to keep up with the times. Outside the academy, the meaning of "environment" has blurred and broadened. Environmental historians face a difficult choice now between developing the subfield by clearly defining disciplinary boundaries and techniques, or by focusing on answering the most fundamental question-what caused historical environmental change?

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[Enlarge 400%]

[Photograph]
Family of Workers at Nyssa, Oregon, Farm

[Footnote]
NOTES
1. Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays (London: Verso, 1980), 67-85.

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consumption and the angel of history

Douglas Cazaux Sackman. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 86-88 (3 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Sackman shares why he is tempted to call Walter Benjamin's cherubim the angel of environmental history. Among other things, a strand of environmental history that looks again at consumerism, tracing the goods with which surrounds people, would show just how ecology, economy, and representations of nature interconnect. The angel of environmental history would pick up the debris, feel its weight, and recognize it as part of what it is to be human.

Full Text (1463 words)

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IN HIS "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin uses a Paul Klee painting, Angelus Novus, as his point of departure for thesis number nine. "This is how one pictures the angel of history," Benjamin writes. "His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress."1

I am tempted to call Benjamin's cherubim the angel of environmental history. Have we not looked back, over history, toward paradise, longingly? Have we not looked at the seemingly senseless chain of events, put them in order, documented the debris they have left, and told our readers to look with new eyes on what we call progress? Have we not, ecologically oriented in our values and aspirations, wished to make whole what has been smashed-even though we know that we put the past back together in our narratives, not in the living, breathing world?

To be sure, one would have to say that this angel is a creature from out of our field's past. We no longer try to look back, to some paradise, and regard all anthropogenic alterations in the earth as evidence of destruction. Paradise was once imagined to lie on the earth's high point-its nipple; everything else was downhill from there. Our histories often implicitly looked up and back to Eden, and configured everything that had happened as declension. We have learned to no longer privilege paradise; we know there is no perfect nature out there, only a world constantly in flux, with or without human beings and the economic systems they have created. We try not to be nostalgic for some better, other place. Though we certainly seek to show the interconnections of people, plants, and animals, we do not pretend that we can holistically heal the past.

Still, there is a lot of significant work to be done even though we have exiled ourselves from paradise-or at least ruled out using it as a measure of change and value. Looked at another way, Benjamin's storm-battered angel facing the debris of progress can point us toward some of what is to be done. Benjamin called the storm progress; environmental historians have a strong tradition of doing the same, or suggesting that a more accurate weather report would name the storm capitalism. A good recent example is William Robbins's penetrating twovolume history of the Oregon Country, but such a narrative is at work in much of what our field has produced.2 For Benjamin, the storm is blowing from paradise. It is hard to imagine how capitalism could gather force in the original garden, but perhaps the fateful bite of the apple brought the storm on. Adam didn't need to eat that apple, but he did so anyway. Should we blame the serpent, or the woman, each of whom had a hand in the fall? (Or the deity, standing off-stage like some Madison Avenue agency with its invisible hands creatingthe irresistible temptations making consumption inevitable and illimitable?) Whoever gets the blame, consumption, in this story of genesis at least, first stirred the winds of change.

For environmentalists and environmental historians, consumerism often appears as the handmaiden of capitalism in their declensionist narratives. As Paul and Anne Ehrlich argue in their recent book One with Nineveh, our habits of consumption call "into question the sustainability of the human enterprise."3 In this formulation, consumption will result in the end of nature, which will at the same time be the end of history. Certainly, an analysis of consumerism is a keystone to any critique of environmental danger and destruction in the modern world. Its ecological and economic importance has not been missed by environmental historians, but we have tended to see things that we consume as nature eviscerated-doornail-dead commodities. We could do more to reveal the social and cultural significance of what we consume.4 There is, of course, a rich historiography on the culture of consumption that does just this. But a problem with most of this work is that it is not grounded. Putting the culture of consumption in its ecological and economic context is something we can do, and this would lead to a fuller understanding of human relations to nature.5

We might take a cue from anthropologists who have argued that objects become animated and enculturated as they are consumed, that "commodities, like persons, have social lives."6 The commodification of nature disenchants the natural world, to be sure; but in entering the human world

nature takes on a second life. The use and consumption of objects connects people to nature, though often in ways they do not themselves recognize. Everything that people are is intertwined with what nature becomes for them. To consider consumption as a key place where nature and culture interact leads us to look more deeply into both the realm of nature from which those goods have come and the social world through which those goods move, make meaning, and create connections. Indeed, how and what humans consume from the natural world plays a large role in the constitution of the social world. No one argues any more that race or gender are a biological given, something determined by nature. But even as we regard them as "social constructions," we should pay closer attention to the building materials for these constructions; they come from nature. Our relations with nature are always already social relations, since the nature we consume and the debris we leave behind contribute to what and who we are. It is the stuff of identity, the material world metastasized and turned into meaning-flesh made into spirit.

In Wim Wenders's film Wings of Desire, the ethereal angels long for the material, desiring desperately to be embodied. Over a decade ago, William Cronon noted in the Journal of American History roundtable on environmental history that our field has been characterized by a split between those works that do a good job of dealing with the material levels of analysis (ecology and economy) and those that deal with the ideological (representations of nature).7 Environmental historians still manifest this split: Some soar with the angels in the empyrean of ideas, others run with the wolves of the forest and marketplace. A strand of environmental history that looks again at consumerism, tracing the goods with which we surround ourselves-both back to nature and forward to human identity and social relations-would show just how the three realms interconnect. The angel of environmental history would pick up the debris, feel its weight, and recognize it as part of what it is to be human. If that is worthy of the angel's attention-his longing as well as his tears-it is worthy of a portion of ours as well.

[Footnote]
NOTES
1. Walter Benjamin, Illuminations: Essays and Reflections (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 257-58.
2. William Robbins, Landscapes of Promise: The Oregon Story, 1890-1940 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997) and Landscapes of Conflict: The Oregon Story, 1940-2000 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).
3. Paul and Anne Ehrlich, One with Nineveh: Politics, Consumption, and the Human Future (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2004), 215.
4. One work in the field that does this quite well is Jennifer Price, Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
5. For cultural histories that begin to draw out ecological implications of consumption, see T. J. Jackson Lears, Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America (New York: Basic Books, 1994); and Susan Strasser, Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999).
6. Arjun Appadurai, ed., The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3. For more on this idea as it relates to environmental history and consumption, see Douglas C. Sackman, "Putting Gender on the Table: Food and the Family Life of Nature," in seeing Nature through Gender, ed. Virginia Scharff (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003): 169-93.
7. William Cronon, "Modes of Prophecy and Production: Placing Nature in History," journal of American History 76 (March 1990): 1123.

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environmental history and ecosystem management

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Abstract (Document Summary)

A managerial approach to environmental manipulation recently has been enshrined in federal policy as Ecosystem Management and has become one of the nation's primary conservation strategies, adopted by the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and agencies responsible for implementation of the Endangered Species Act. Ecosystem management is vaguely defined as the application of ecological principles to natural resources for the purpose of achieving both conservation and social needs. Schneider shares how environmental historians, who have just begun to examine ecosystem management, can provide critical analysis of this increasingly dominant way of understanding and managing nature.

Full Text (918 words)

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A MANAGERIAL APPROACH to environmental manipulation recently has been enshrined in federal policy as "Ecosystem Management" and has become one of the nation's primary conservation strategies, adopted by the United States Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and agencies responsible for implementation of the Endangered Species Act. Ecosystem management is vaguely defined as the application of ecological principles to natural resources for the purpose of achieving both conservation and social needs. Despite its importance in policy, however, and over a thousand articles since 1983 describing it in the scientific literature, ecosystem management as a process remains poorly understood.

Environmental historians, who have just begun to examine ecosystem management, can provide critical analysis of this increasingly dominant way of understanding and managing nature. Historians have examined natural-resource management during the early history of conservation, but more work remains to be done to connect ecosystem management to its historic antecedents in forest, range, and river management. In doing so, environmental historians should further explore and interrogate the term "management" itself. What does it mean to manage an ecosystem, and what were the origins of such an explicitly managerial approach to the environment? The last century has seen a number of innovations in the approach to management in business, engineering, and defense that could illuminate the ideology and techniques underlying a managerial approach to the environment. For example, the connections between the environment and Taylorism and other movements for scientific management around the turn of the century, or between operations research in the defense industries and the growth of ecosystem analysis in ecology during the post-World-War-II period need to be explored. The impact on environmental management of more recent paradigms from computing, such as neural networks, fuzzy logic, or expert systems, also would enrich our understanding of ecosystem management.

Environmental historians can usefully explore how humans affect the environment by examining those instances where people purposefully manage ecological systems, either for biodiversity or resource

extraction, conservation, or recreation. As historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have shown, resource extraction in forestry and mining dramatically changed the environment. Environmental change was also planned. Yet environmental historians have tended to overlook one group of people involved in directing this change: urban and regional planners. The field can more directly engage the history of planning and planners' roles in managing environmental change. Richard White's work on the Columbia River and Adam Rome's on suburban development offer important examples, but there are numerous instances where an explicit focus on planning could illuminate the process and politics influencing the direction of environmental transformation.

Drawing on the insights of science studies, environmental historians can take the field in new directions by further investigating the practice of ecosystem management as performed by scientists and engineers, fisheries and forestry workers, planners and policy makers. A specific focus on the day-to-day practice of ecosystem management helps reveal how people understand the environment and use that knowledge to manipulate it. Work on the history of wildlife and fisheries management, for instance, reveals the importance not only of ecological science, but also the practical knowledge of workers in the industry. By tracing the connections between ecologists and fishermen in my own work on the Illinois River, I was able to describe how the science of ecology depended on the knowledge developed by local residents who fished and hunted along the river, and how the practice of ecology was connected to the local politics of environmental transformation.

Extending this investigation of day-to-day practice, one fruitful area for research into ecosystem management is to move the focus from the natural world to the study of industrial ecosystems. Sewage-treatment plants, breweries, biotechnology reactors, or ethanol-production plants are all environments, for they are complex biophysical systems in which communities of bacteria, yeast, and other organisms are maintained to extract resources such as fertilizer, food, pharmaceuticals, or fuel. Those environments offer rich opportunities for environmental historians to bring the history of science and technology together with industrial, labor, and environmental history. Controlled and managed by scientists, engineers, and laborers, yet operating under constraints imposed by corporations and governments and by the biophysical systems themselves, industrial ecosystems can be treated as microcosms in which all the multiple influences impinging on larger ecosystems are present.

One area of research opened up by the study of these environments is the role of expertise in ecosystem management. Ecological science has made a claim as the relevant science for ecosystem management. This is a question open to historical investigation, however. In my examination of sewage-treatment plants, for instance, I have found that ecosystem management in practice is just as dependent on the expertise and knowledge of industrial workers who have developed their own understandings of the system. The practice of ecosystem management has thus depended on the outcome of contested knowledge as this craft knowledge has vied with ecological and engineering understandings of the system for much of the twentieth century. By studying these industrial ecologies, environmental historians can reveal the contours of the practice of ecosystem management, and provide insight into the problems and possibilities of how people can manage other ecosystems, such as forests, oceans, or even cities.

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recentism in environmental history on latin america

Andrew Sluyter. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 91-93 (3 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

During the first decade of Environmental History, articles on Latin America have been numerous and diverse. They approach these topics from several complementary perspectives: ecological, cultural, political, and economic. Sluyter discusses recentism in environmental history on Latin America.

Full Text (1055 words)

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DURING THE FIRST decade of Environmental History, articles on Latin America have been numerous and diverse. While understandably far fewer than articles on North America, those on Latin America represent a proportion roughly equal to those on Europe, Asia, and Africa. Also, they span a diversity of subregions, topics, and approaches. From Patagonia to the Rio Grande, from Andean slopes to Amazonian lowlands, they cover agricultural to industrial topics. They approach these topics from several complementary perspectives: ecological, cultural, political, and economic.

Yet those same contributions do exhibit one notable bias: recentism. They disproportionately focus on the twentieth century, followed closely by an affinity for the nineteenth century. In fact, twice as many articles focus on those two centuries as on all others combined.

Rhys Jones's content analysis of the major geography journals suggests that such recentism might reflect a broader trend.1 Since the 1980s, those journals have in general shifted toward an overwhelming emphasis on the present and recent past. The content even of the Journal of Historical Geography has come to emphasize research on high modernity, with the majority of articles focusing on the early 1800s through the mid 1900s. One factor driving recentism might be the relative ease of working with recent versus older source materials. In combination with growing pressures to produce more rather than better research, that factor might be discouraging academics from taking on projects involving early modern times.

Even without more fully understanding the causes of recentism, though, attention to its intellectual costs will, I hope, persuade environmental historians to resist it. Generally, and quite ironically, recentism precludes understanding recent history because understanding modernity requires understanding how the salient characteristics of modern regimes emerged out of the disjunctures and continuities between premodern and early modern times. As Carl Sauer noted in reference to Mexico, "we may yet best delineate the basic traits of this land and its peoples from its prehistoric geography and from its geography of the sixteenth century."2

My first example illustrates how research on the colonial period is necessary to any realistic understanding of recent environmental history.3 Despite the promises of a Mexican Green Revolution

in the 19505, by the 19705 proofs of its failure began to mount, including the need for corn imports, biodiversity loss, aquifer pollution, soil erosion, blight susceptibility, fossil-fuel dependence, land consolidation, rural pauperization, and rapid population growth. The Green Revolution's latest iteration, involving genetically modified (GM) crop varieties, now threatens to contaminate, overwhelm, and homogenize the heterogeneous germplasm resource that Mexican farmers have created over thousands of years. Despite the Green Revolution having thus failed to reduce hunger while very effectively destroying much environmental and cultural heterogeneity, Mexico continues to disown its highly productive and sustainable indigenous food production systems in favor of GM crops. Understanding why requires understanding how, during the colonial period, indigenismo became established among the nationalist Creoles who later became the ruling elite of independent Mexico. Indigenismo remains a central element in Mexican cultural politics: Its discourse celebrates ancient Maya and Aztec architecture, art, and military heroes to the exclusion of the accomplishments of living natives. Thus the ancient Maya became the Greeks of the New World while the living Maya and their land-use practices became categorically "traditional," supposedly too conservative to actively participate in economic development models that focus on the diffusion and adoption of western institutions and technologies. Accordingly, Mexico's germplasm resources have become the ancient patrimony of all humankind while biotechnology corporations develop GM crops from that germplasm and patent them to the detriment of native peoples and their local agricultural knowledge and crop varieties. Understanding the recent environmental history of Mexican agriculture therefore requires understandingthe colonial emergence of indigenismo and other such elements in the process of political struggle over resources.

My second example illustrates the necessity for research on processes that emerged as part of what Carl Sauer termed "prehistoric geography." Some have concluded that a pi ague of sheep, among other livestock the Spaniards introduced into Mexico, caused such severe soil erosion in the sixteenth century that its consequences for modern development and environmental conservation continue to the present. Supposedly, exponential increases in grazing densities resulted in widespread decreases in vegetation cover and consequent soil erosion. Yet that vegetation had coevolved with ice-age herbivores, like the horses that propagated many trees by eating their pods and fruits. With extinction of those herbivores about ten thousand years ago and the emergence of plant domestication soon thereafter, those trees lost their primary dispersal agents, increasingly suffered the assault of agricultural clearance through burning, and therefore became minor elements in the landscape. When the Spaniards introduced livestock that could again propagate those trees, they re-expanded into former agricultural fields that were becoming pastures as pathogens like smallpox, also introduced by the Spaniards, vastly reduced the native population. Livestock thus did not so much precipitate new ecological processes involving changes in vegetation cover as reestablish lapsed ones. Understanding the recent, continuing consequences of colonial livestock introductions therefore requires understanding precolonial processes involved in interactions among animals, plants, soils, and people as well as the disjunctures and continuities those processes underwent during the early colonial period-which is exactly why Sauer singled out the sixteenth century as being so critical to the present.

In sum, doing precolonial and colonial environmental history is necessary to doing recent environmental history. Recognition of the intellectual costs of an increasingly exclusive focus on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will, I hope, persuade environmental historians to resist the institutional forces encouraging such recentism.

Enlarge 200%
Enlarge 400%

[Photograph]

A Woman Technician Tests Car Emissions, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1970s.

[Footnote]
NOTES
Many thanks to Adam Rome for the invitation to contribute to this forum, to Carina Giusti for assistance with content analysis of Environmental History, and to Craig Colten for feedback on a draft.
1. Rhys Jones, "What Time Human Geography?," Progress in Human Geography (2004): 287-304.
2. Carl O. Sauer, "The Personality of Mexico," Geographical Review (1941): 354.
3. For fuller accounts of the two examples, see Andrew Sluyter, Colonialism and Landscape: Postcolonial Theory and Applications (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

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Andrew Sluyter is assistant professor of geography and anthropology at Louisiana State University. His recent book Colonialism and Landscape (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002) won the 2004 James M. Blaut Award from the CAPE Specialty Croup of the Association of American Geographers.

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history's freaks of nature

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Soluri comments that he fears for the future of environmental history. Distracted by jazzed-up journal covers and cozy conference venues, environmental historians are unaware of the risks posed by what they have become: an increasingly professionalized and disciplined subfield of history. Here, he offers several provisional guidelines on how to forment a freaky future for environmental history.

Full Text (827 words)

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"If the freaks could only unite."

-Red hot Chili Peppers

I FEAR FOR the future of environmental history. Distracted by jazzed-up journal covers and cozy conference venues, we are unaware of the risks posed by what we have become: an increasingly professionalized and disciplined subfield of history. While some of us may long for an opportunity to be a talking head on the History Channel, I suspect that the next revolution in history will not be televised (even on cable). Instead, to preserve the wildness of the field, I urge environmental historians to freak

out!

What is a freak? Merriam-Webster offers four principle definitions:

1. A sudden and odd or seemingly pointless idea or turn of the mind;

2. A whimsical quality or disposition (archaic);

3. One that is markedly unusual or abnormal;

4. An ardent enthusiast.

To judge by this evidence, 75 percent-a clear majority-of the meanings of "freak" are positive or at least neutral: freaks are creative, whimsical, and passionate. Still not ready to embrace freakdom? Consider this interesting fact: The etymology of "freak" is unknown. The absence of a traceable lineage makes it ripe for appropriation by people regardless of race, class, gender, or age. Of course, dictionary definitions ignore the fact that freakiness is fluid and best understood in relation to other socially constructed identities.

In the interest of fomenting a freaky future for environmental history, I offer the following provisional guidelines:

1. Freaks eschew the mainstream, but they are not abnormal: The pejorative use of "freak" is nasty because it seeks to impose a dualistic world of fixed margins and centers-it tries to push people out of society's bounds. This is very dangerous because nature is nothing but never-ending variation. We are all descended from mutants-we are all freaks of a historical nature.

2. Freaks are intellectuals, but they are not always academics: Freaks may or may not give a damn about tenure and citation indices. But they are committed to questioning and at times subverting mainstream ways of thinking about life in general and environments in particular because this is a vital social function that freaks play for the (shifting) center.

3. Freaks are intellectually kinky, but freaks are not sluts: Freaky environmental historians are always on the lookout for attractive ideas emanating from other disciplines including, but not limited to, the biological sciences.

However, interdisciplinary relationships must be based on equity and mutual self-respect. If environmental historians find that scientists are not prepared to recognize the intellectual rigor and analytical power of their methodologies, theories, and practices, then they should not waste precious time and energy trying to gain legitimacy through intimate connections with Big Science. In practical terms, this means that environmental history freaks will need to seek out science freaks: New intellectual models will result from "edge effects"-fringe places where domains of knowledge overlap.

4. Freaks value a sense of place, but freaks are not nationalists: Freaks speak and write in many languages and live in many places. They struggle to overcome imperial geographies by reading and thinking in both comparative and transregional frameworks. In order for this to be more than pie-in-the-sky rhetoric, freaks affiliated with powerful and wealthy institutions will have to think long and hard about how to assist the production of environmental histories in historically impoverished places. Freaking out is seldom free.

5. Freaks value life, they oppose capital punishment: Freaks appreciate the historical power of capital and the ability of economic theories to help explain that power. They also grasp the historical limits of capital's power and the inability of economic theory to account for those limits. People and non-human life forms have value but they are not commodities. Therefore, freaks resist the imposition of lifeless

labels such as "human capital" and "natural capital."

6. Freaks tend to inhabit the land, but they are not afraid of the water: Most of the planet is not solid, yet environmental historians-myself included-tend to focus on "changes in the land." Wouldn't it be freaky to write histories that truly linked land, sea, and sky by following the flows?

7. Freaks are PC compatible, but their strength lies in the past: Freaky historians make good use of DVD, GIS, JSTOR, TCP/IP, TIFF, and ZIP. They also know that nothing can replace a sturdy ASS for reading in archives and listening to old folks.

8. Freaks are counterhegemonic, but freaks are not fools: Freaks respect-indeed thrive upon-different approaches to life. They possess multiple identities that influence their thoughts, actions, and habitats. Consequently, embracing intellectual freakiness does not commit oneself to any particular political agenda or intellectual paradigm beyond questioning all agendas and resisting programs that seek to manage-rather than respect-diversity.

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Document 25 of 29

postcards from the edges of a field

Ellen Stroud. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 96-97 (2 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Stroud shares that summer brings the student postcards, she gets more postcards than e-mail from her students during the summer months. She also mentions that the image in postcards is as important as the words scribbled next to her address. She cites that postcards depicting cityscapes from students of her urban environments seminar pleases her the most.

Full Text (1077 words)

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SUMMER BRINGS the student postcards: of grain elevators, of cornfields, of combines; of sunsets, of gorges, of odd rock formations; of skylines, of highways, of parks. I get more postcards than e-mail from my students during the summer months, though digital cameras may change that soon. The

image is as important as the words scribbled next to my address. My correspondents are sharing landscapes they want me to see.

The postcard notes have a common theme: a disorienting new view of a nature formerly seen as pure. I am tickled and entertained and sometimes proud that my students take a minute on the hiking trail, on the bike path, or at the postcard rack to remark on the fact that they now see history where they once saw only trees. Teaching people that forests, rivers, oceans, and fields have complex pasts intertwined with human stories has been a major project of environmental historians, and it has worked.

But although my students now see something more complicated than before, the images they choose are still just trees. Or rivers. Or farms. Or beaches. Occasionally, the students from my urban environments seminar will send cards depicting cityscapes: tenement housing, a tangle of highways, a well-designed park. But whether "natural" or "built," the common subject of the cards is "environment." The images might be of dirt and worms and leaves, or traffic and smog and trash, but "environment" is always clear; it is the history, the change over time, the human role in a story worth telling that has to be teased out. It is almost never the other way around. I rarely look at a card and see the history, the event, the narrative, and wonder how environment fits in.

And those would be cards that would please me the most. I want a postcard from the Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, on which my student explains how important "environment" is to the history told there. I want a picture of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall that inspires my student to reflect on environmental history's contribution to helping her understand the war. I want people who have taken my classes to choose images of monuments, of protest sites, of battlefields and government buildings and legislative halls, marveling at how they can now see nature where it had earlier been obscured. I love that they can see history in the trees; now I want them to see trees everywhere they turn.

My favorite card to date was slipped under my door in spring 2002. It was homemade, the picture on the front a radiant smiling photograph of one of my sharpest graduating seniors, who was (and remains) a committed activist for justice and peace. Beaming and completely limp, she was being carried away from U.S. Senator Mike DeWine's office by two police officers. She and nine others had been at DeWine's Columbus, Ohio, office that day as part of a sustained campaign of protest against U.S. policies in Colombia. The politics on the card were clear; environment, at first, was not.

My student and her fellow protesters, she explained, saw explicit connections between the United States' war on drugs, the destruction of coca plantations in Colombia, exposure to environmental hazards, compromised health and nutrition among impoverished Colombians, and unnecessary violence and suffering. She was beaming in the photograph because she was successfully calling attention to a point that she felt had to be made: Drug policy is environmental policy is social policy is health policy, all of which must be judicious and just, and understood as intertwined. I want more cards like hers, but they don't arrive.

It isn't because my students don't know what I want. The books I assign, the lectures I give, the debates we have in class, the projects we work on together are all centered on the theme of environment in unexpected places. And they get it: Our most animated time together is when they uncover nature in a place they had not expected it to be. When they realize that environmental history can help them understand the Revolutionary War, the Great Depression, the 1977 New York City Blackout-when they realize that our class is not going to be all about parks and rivers and environmental politics-that is when they get the most excited. So why doesn't it carry over to the cards?

I think because it's truly hard to make that mental shift. On an intellectual level, they get it, but at the postcard rack, they don't. And here is where the cards distill a central challenge in our field: Like my students, we keep coming back to rivers and parks and trees, even when we know the bigger questions lie somewhere else. We return again and again to obvious nature, to nature we can touch and see and enjoy, to environments that can be pictured on a postcard and seemingly comprehended

at a glance. We then explain how complex that nature really is, how much the surface comprehension in fact obscures. But even so, the easy nature is most often where we start. I would like to see us reach more often for stories where environment, not history, is hard to see.

There is a danger in that, of course. We risk losing the distinctive center of our field. These days, the pictures my students send me stand out from the ones my history department colleagues receive: They get museums, historic buildings, monuments and battle sites, art and artifacts and people, and I get trees and trails. Do I really want my cards to be the same as theirs? Oddly, I do, and think it worth the cost, because I want all of us-historians and students both-to see environmental history everywhere we look, on every postcard we pick up. Only when we see unexpected nature as clearly as the trees will we catch sight of the true importance of environment in our histories and our lives.

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Ellen Stroud is an assistant professor of history at Oberlin College. She is on leave this year at Harvard's Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, with support from an American Council of Learned Societies/Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Junior Faculty Fellowship. She is completing revisions on the manuscript for her first book, seeing the Trees: Reforestation and Urbanization in the Northeastern United States, and is spending this year working on a new hook project, Dead As Dirt: An Environmental History of the Dead Body.

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representing the resource

Paul S Sutter. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 98-100 (3 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Sutter relates Leon Neel and his mentor, the late Herbert Stoddard's system for managing hardwoods--that has been crucial to preserving the scattered fragments of a system that once covered 70-90 million acres of the southeastern coastal plain. Neel has spent his entire adult life thwarting that successional tendency by burning these woods, as a surrogate for the lightning strikes and earlier human inhabitants whose fires shaped what was once one of the most extensive North American forest types.

Full Text (1509 words)

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LEON NEEL LOVES a good fire. I recently drove with Leon and Bert Way, a Ph.D. candidate in history at the University of Georgia, through Greenwood Plantation near Thomasville, Georgia, one of the few supreme tracts of longleaf pine left in the Southeast, right after a hot spring burn. "This was a good

fire," Leon gushed as we crept through the forest, its understory temporarily blackened. Soon the wiregrass-a definitive marker of minimal human disturbance-would spring to life, as would the system's staggeringly diverse array of forbs and legumes. But always there, threatening to grow up into what southerners have long referred to as "rough," were incipient hardwoods. In the absence of regular fire, a hardwood forest was where nature, such as it is, would take this landscape. Leon Neel has spent his entire adult life thwarting that successional tendency by burning these woods, as a surrogate for the lightning strikes and earlier human inhabitants whose fires shaped what was once one of the most extensive North American forest types.

Leon and his mentor, the late Herbert Stoddard, developed a system for managing these woods-the Stoddard/Neel Method-that has been crucial to preserving the scattered fragments of a system that once covered 70-90 million acres of the southeastern coastal plain. Leon went to work for Stoddard in 1950, almost two decades after Stoddard published his landmark wildlife study, The Bobwhite Quail (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931). Stoddard undertook the quail study at the behest of wealthy landowners in southern Georgia and northern Florida, who had in the early twentieth century assembled massive quail-hunting plantations, most with good stands of longleaf, from lands sliding into agricultural marginality. By the 1920s, these men of privilege were tryingto figure out why their quail populations were in decline. Stoddard had a number of answers, but the most important was the absence of fire. Over time, Stoddard and Neel began to look beyond the production of quail, a disturbance species that thrives in longleaf forests riddled with primitive agricultural patches (of the sort made by sharecropping), to see the fuller system. In doing so, their management confronted intra-system competition and trade-offs. The landscape in which quail did best was not necessarily one in which wiregrass was valued, and the winter burning kindest to quail breeding did not promote the landscape diversity that a more varied burning schedule did. While Stoddard and Neel remained committed to meeting management imperatives to produce quail-and, increasingly, timber-they began preaching the virtues of system integrity and pegging their management to that goal. We might call it ecosystem management. As Leon puts it, they began "representing the resource."

What does this have to do with the future of environmental history? In his dissertation, Bert will examine the ecological history of this system and the considerable social and cultural tensions present at the birth of longleaf conservation. So I can cut to the chase. What I find compelling about Leon's management in this landscape is how it pushes beyond several categorical oppositions and lacunae that have characterized our field's sensibility over the last decade or so. Let me mention a few examples.

Leon is working to preserve a once-extensive North American landscape, but wilderness is a term of little use to him. The lands under his care must be actively managed (mostly with fire), and most will have to remain working landscapes if they are to be protected (though, in this case, lightly worked by landowners who do not have to wrest life's essentials from these piney woods). These forests are not pristine, and they exist in defiance of where nature would take them if left alone. But this does not make them merely cultural landscapes. They stand comfortably between nature and culture, and we need to do the same. These woods may not be wilderness, but there is plenty of wildness in them; they may be inscribed with human intention, but they also reflect human wisdom and restraint. Places like Greenwood are the products of a more careful dialogue with the natural than, say, a slash pine plantation, and a managerial reverence for their natural history is at the heart of their integrity and beauty. We need new ways to talk about the cultured wildness of places like these.

During his decades-long dialogue with the longleaf-wiregrass system, Leon Neel has learned to love stochasticity. Rather than steering the lands he manages towards a static ideal form, Leon aims to perpetuate the diversity built by small-scale disturbances and patch dynamics. Stochasticity allows him an entrance into the forest as a participant in its processes; it lets him experiment creatively and watch how various patches respond. When he marks timber, for instance, he looks for ways to mimic a windfall or other canopy-opening events. By cutting trees cautiously and with particular ecological objectives, he becomes a sculptor of the uneven-aged forest that the region's natural history produced until it was severely disturbed by industrial timber cutting. For Leon, the stochastic forest of history is normative, and his managerial "art" (the term he prefers) is to render its details and processes faithfully. If we are to make sense of landscapes like these, environmental historians must move

beyond seeing chaotic ecology as only a destabilizer of traditional narratives. We need to build new stories of people interacting with a nature that is more recognizably historical.

Like many Americans of the last century who cared deeply about a natural world crashing down around them, Leon became a scientific conservationist. But his methods also sprang from regional folk practices often seen as antithetical to modern conservation. As Stoddard and Neel pushed professional foresters and timber managers to rethink the role of fire in the longleaf system, they did so from a hybrid position, at once of the conservation establishment and defiant of its orthodoxies. Today, when land owners and managers approach Leon and ask for his expert advice on how to get started with fire management, his first impulse is to hand them a box of matches. That subversive sensibility-the residue of the southern backwoods-burning tradition, and of the Native American one that preceded and informed it-is always there, defying the efforts of those who would strip his management of the years' worth of practical learning that inform it. Leon's career suggests that, in the realm of conservation management, folk practices and scientific principles have had a complex dialectical history to which we must attend.

Above all else, Leon Neel does what he does because he wants to live among these trees, in an environment with some historical depth of field. In that commitment, he points to a blind spot in our field: aesthetics. We have dismantled the wilderness climax that was the field's foundational aesthetic, but in the process we have become suspicious of the entire aesthetic endeavor-the search for what is beautiful and meaningful in nature. Now, as we move into a world in which the discrete structures of nature and culture are collapsing into a single pile, a world in which conservationists confront the reality that few natural systems lack cultural interventions and legacies, the need to pursue sophisticated aesthetic judgments-and to argue fiercely over what constitutes environmental quality-is pressing. Environmental historians recently have recoiled from "representing the resource," chastened by past mistakes and injustices that have occurred in the name of speaking for nature. Now we need to get back into the fray as pragmatists, realizingthat while beauty may ultimately be a cultural value rather than an objective natural quality, we come to our sense of the beautiful-and valuable-only in dialogue with the natural. Aesthetics is a representational process, the product of a conversation between subject and object. In this sense, Leon Neel has been representing the resource in two ways: Not only has he been a voice for preserving the remnant longleaf forests of the southeast, but he also has been creating, over the last half century, a series of representations of what he has found beautiful in these woods and how he thinks they ought to look. But while his values and preferences drive his interventions, they do not alone determine the results. Natural processes respond to his brushstrokes, and he replies in turn. Leon is involved in a managerial call and response, and his capacity to represent the resource, his sense of its quality, grows with each exchange.

Leon Neel not only loves a good fire; after years of tossing lit matches into patches of wiregrass matted down with pine-needle fuel, he knows what a good fire is. And that goodness cannot be reduced to abstract ecological principles; it resides in the very quality of the exchange. If environmental historians are to represent the resource-and, arguably, that's what we are paid to do-then we similarly need to put our values in dialogue with the natural.

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where the grass is always greener

William M Tsutsui. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 101-102 (2 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Tsutsui comments that he is a latecomer to environmental history, and that his mid-career conversion experience has shaped his sense of the field's future. He cites that what has drawn him to environmental history is the thrill of applying a sophisticated and new historical literature to times and places that had never been examined through an environmental lens.

Full Text (935 words)

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I AM A LATECOMER to environmental history, and my mid-career conversion experience has shaped my sense of the field's future.

For the better part of twenty years-through multiple theses, a dissertation, two monographs, an anthology, and countless seminars, symposia, and topics courses-I toiled in the foursquare confines of business and economic history.

For most of that time, it was a good and stimulating life intellectually: Banking and management seemed promising angles for understanding modern Japan, the field of business history seemed energetic and reasonably creative, economic statistics seemed so reassuringly concrete and conclusive.

But in the late 1990s, my research interests began to stray. The hallway whispering at national conferences increasingly bemoaned business history as a "dead field," the literature seemed to grow less rich and more derivative, and, as Japan's "Great Recession" stretched on for over a decade, the allure of economic analysis as the key to Japanese history started to fade. In a serendipitous lull between major projects, I decided to make the leap to environmental history and retool myself mid-career (an intellectual exercise I would, incidentally, recommend to anyone). I was drawn to environmental history not just by the insistent proselytizing of colleagues in the field, but by the thrill of applying a sophisticated and (to me, at least) new historical literature to times and places that had never been examined through an environmental lens. Moreover, environmental history seemed (and seems) relevant to concerns beyond the ivory tower in a way that the more esoteric and ingrown concerns of business and economic history regrettably now do not.

I am, of course, not alone in being a defector. A quick check of the CVs of some of the most prominent scholars publishing on Japanese environmental historyConrad Totman, Gavan McCormack, Tessa Morris-Suzuki-will reveal first (and sometimes second, third, and fourth) books written on topics far distant from the environment. This is hardly surprising, since even when I went through graduate school in the late 1980s, finding advanced training in East Asian environmental history was well-nigh impossible (and still remains far from easy today). Happily, the pattern of scholars coming to environmental history somewhat belatedly in their careers has, I believe, been beneficial to the development of the field. Converts like myself have helped infuse environmental history with what I

consider the best kind of interdisciplinarity-an organic integration of approaches and perspectives from one established subfield, be it economic, political, or military history, with the evolving frameworks and emerging theories of environmental historians. My training in business history has served me well in the transition to working on the Japanese environment: The professional discourses of efficiency engineers, it turns out, resonate strongly with those of hydrologists, fisheries bureaucrats, and even birdwatchers; the managerial theories applied to industrial labor have their echoes, or perhaps their origins, in strategies for administering natural resources.

The future will bring more scholarly migrants into environmental history, as long as the field retains its intellectual spark and its practitioners retain their passion, both for the environment itself and the history that they write. Environmental history has certainly gone beyond being a historiographical flash in the pan, just another of the discipline wannabes-"disability studies," "entrepreneurship"-that have proliferated in recent years. Yet in its very success lie hazards. As the field becomes more established, it may well grow more narrow and, eventually, ossified; like so many other topical slivers of the historical profession, environmental history runs the risk of becoming fixated on a limited range of time-honored debates and obsessed by precisely delineating (rather than constantly expanding) the intellectual boundaries of the field. As more young scholars are trained specifically as environmental historians, some of the field's interdisciplinary nature and its pioneering-dare one say crusading?-edge may be lost. Business history is an object lesson, having traced such a trajectory from the brave new world of Alfred Chandler's Visible Hand (1977) to the doldrums of today. The perceived relevance of a field, the excitement and creativity of its practitioners, and its honeymoon on the cutting edge of scholarship can all evaporate in a terrifyingly short time. That being said, I strongly suspect that the pervasive interdisciplinary connections between environmental history and the "hard" sciences, the sensitivity of so many environmental historians to the policy implications of their work, and their intense, infectious personal commitment to the enterprise of environmental history will give it a long scholarly shelf life as a vibrant (or what some might call a "paradigm generating") field.

The future also should bring more frequent and intensive engagement between environmental historians in North America and scholars abroad, especially, I believe, in Asia. Japanese historians have long worked on environmental topicsnotably forestry, fisheries, and agriculture, especially in the early modern periodbut few Japanese researchers have yet framed their work within the Western discourse of environmental history. In the coming years and decades, we can look forward to our study of the environment being enriched by new perspectives from overseas historians, and to our approaches and frameworks being extended to their investigations as well. Such global cross-pollination is not necessarily inevitable, but will require initiative and resources from environmental historians and interested organizations both in North America and abroad. We can rest assured that the individual and intellectual returns of international bridgebuilding will make the investments of time, energy, and (scarce) funding well worthwhile.

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euro-english and the art of environmental history

Petra J E M van Dam. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 103-105 (3 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Environmental history transcends national boundaries. Maybe in Europe this is even truer than in the US. Europeans share large ecosystems that are not confined by national boundaries. Here, van Dam discusses euro-English and the art of environmental history.

Full Text (1339 words)

Copyright Environmental History Jan 2005

ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY transcends national boundaries. Maybe in Europe this is even truer than in the United States.1 Europeans share large ecosystems that are not confined by national boundaries. Among them are seas (Baltic, North, Mediterranean), mountains (Pyrenees, Alps, Carpathians) and rivers: The river Rhine cuts through four different countries where people speak at least three different languages (German, French, Dutch). Furthermore, Europeans profit from studying large issues of environmental history in a comparative perspective, yet in the context of national histories: Urban hygiene from the late Middle Ages onward, industrial pollution from early modern times onward, and landscape destruction due to the collapse of agriculture in our time are phenomena that appeared all over Europe, but in all sorts of variants.

Why do such environmental topics gain from cross-national research? Of course the general background of our history is European culture. Describe it whatever way you want, but Europeans had and have a shared system of norms and beliefs, traditions, and even art styles, originating in our common ancient and medieval Romano-Germanic-Christian roots. Also, our legacy of wars means that the borders within Europe have changed many times, and migration has been a normal thing for millennia. Since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, this mixture has been enriched with increasingly important norms about political, economic and personal freedom-norms that are reflected in the basic features of our societies' institutions, be they laws, education structures, or environmentalprotection bodies. In daily lives and scholarly practice, however, we are not so intrigued by basic similarities; mainly we are busy overcoming all sorts of practical cultural differences. One of the most urgent for me is language.

The need for a universal language is not new in Europe, but we have arrived at a new phase of development. Until the end of the Middle Ages, all scholars communicated in Latin, the language of the long-deceased Roman Empire, and for many of them this continued well into the eighteenth century. Newton still published his treatises in Latin, but Darwin did so in English. Publishing is important for international communication, but today this is not sufficient anymore, because the oral means of communication are increasing in scope and frequency. This development had started already with the rise of modern transportation, but with the increase in the number of conferences and the advent of e-mail, the trend entered a new phase. For, to be sure, e-mailing is closer to conversation than to writing. One does not take time to consult a dictionary, let alone a translator. So we have a new phase of international communication that is more oriented toward oral use of language than ever before.

In Europe, so far, one of the important ways we have solved the problems with the dozens of languages is what I call the regional system. The languages of the largest countries have come to

serve as secondary languages in the surrounding countries. Consequently, most European scholars read at least one, and often two other languages besides their native language, and many also speak one or more languages, particularly if they come from small countries. Research groups operate in several languages and at conferences do so even simultaneously! How does it work? Recently I attended the well-organized "Third Round Table for Urban Environmental History" in Siena, Italy. The contributors came from at least five different cultures, predominantly from the west and south, and the conference languages were English and French. As a result, we had papers presented in the one conference language, while speakers projected a translation in the other language on a screen behind them. For presentations this works fairly well, but for discussions and informal conversations one has to choose. (I have experienced a conference with translators and headphones too, but that is cumbersome; most translators are simply not specialized enough, apart from the fact that this is an extremely costly way of overcoming language differences).

How does the regional system work when it comes to publications? The Urban Round Table group publishes its proceedings in volumes that contain both contributions in English and French and also has a title in the two languages, for instance, Le Démon Moderne-La pollution dans les sociétés urbaines et industrielles d'Europe/The Modem Demon-Pollution in Urban and Industrial European Societies. This solution to the language problem may work very well now and for the region this conference drew its participants from, but one wonders what future it has, in particular for more formally organized research at a panEuropean scale. Also, only a few publishers accept multilingual books.

Organizing research programs that transcend national boundaries is feasible, for "European" funding exists, coming from the European Union (cost.cordis.lu) and from the European Science Foundation (www.esf.org), which is a kind of independent small EU for scholars only. In reality, however, research groups often tend to keep things simple and set up programs with only one or two groups in neighboring countries. A curious result is the recent publication of a report of such a modest project dealing with medieval water mills in the area between the Rhine and Scheide rivers. The thin book consists of three highly specialized contributions in German, French, and Dutch, but the introduction and summary are translated in all three languages. Of course this book has a title in all three languages: Abijmolens tussen Rijn en Schelde/Moulins abbatieux entre Rhin et Escaut/Abteimühlen zwischen Rhein und Scheide.

None of what I indicate here on the diversity of languages in Europe and the confusions and costs it creates for cross-national research is new. But in environmental history something is new. In 1999 a European Society for Environmental History was founded and we chose to use one language only: English. The radical choice for (Euro-) English has some disadvantages. For people with a strong background in the humanities who cherish languages as cultural treasures, like me, it feels miserable to use a foreign language and realize that one is constantly damaging it because one is simply not well-trained enough. Also, one feels constantly hampered by a lack of skills to express exactly the nuances one uses in the native language. Environmental history, perhaps more so for those coming from the humanities than from the sciences, is a lot about historical changes of morals and values that are necessarily culturally bounded. Here language is very sensitive too. Furthermore, a sad practical disadvantage of the choice of one language is that some European governments give grants only for congresses if scholars use their national language for the paper. So at the ESEH meetings, some regions of Europe are remarkably underrepresented.

However, in the long term, what is the alternative? Probably we do not have to answer this question. The future for European scholars is being influenced already by semi-independent social-economic and social-political developments. When I was a student, now twenty years ago, in my country all students in the humanities had two to three foreign languages in their intellectual baggage upon arriving at the university. Now this has been reduced to English only. High pressures on the school system have eroded the language component to the advantage of new subjects such as computer sciences and social skills. So, many of the publications of my fellow colleagues in Europe, the very people I meet at conferences and with whom I e-mail regularly, cannot be used in my seminars anymore. A strong need for English-language literature written by specialists about European

environmental history has risen.

Filling in the gap of cross-national literature is certainly one of the next big tasks for environmental history in Europe.

[Footnote]
NOTES
1. For a recent state of the art, see Verena Winiwarter, et al., eds., "Environmental History in Europe from 1994 to 2004: Enthusiasm and Consolidation," Environment and History 4 (2004): 501-30.

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the other seven tenths

Lance van Sittert. **Environmental History** Durham:Jan 2005. Vol. 10, Iss. 1, p. 106-109 (4 pp.)

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Abstract (Document Summary)

The dawn of the twenty-first century has witnessed mounting alarm not only over humanity's unsustainable use of the marine environment in the present, but also its "over fishing" of large marine vertebrates in the past. The belated recognition of the latter has exacerbated the problem of "shifting baselines" for contemporary modelling of marine ecosystems. Here, van Sittert provides details on the History of Marine Animal Populations, a decade-long international scientific stock-taking of the diversity, distribution, and abundance of life in the sea initiated by the Census of Marine Life.

Full Text (1633 words)

Copyright Environmental History Jan 2005

THE DAWN OF the twenty-first century has witnessed mounting alarm not only over humanity's unsustainable use of the marine environment in the present, but also its "over fishing" of large marine vertebrates in the past.1 The belated recognition of the latter has exacerbated the problem of "shifting baselines" for contemporary modelling of marine ecosystems.2 As Jeremy Jackson notes in a seminal article on the Caribbean, "History shows that Caribbean coastal ecosystems were severely degraded long before ecologists began to study them. ... Studying grazing and predation of reefs today is like trying to understand the ecology of the Serengeti by studying the termites and the locusts while ignoring the elephants and the wildebeeste."3

Jackson's work amongothers has catalysed a radical turn to historical ecology in the marine sciences in pursuit of the "ghosts" of modern marine ecosystems with their keystone megafauna reinstated.4 As Jackson and Enric Sala explain, "We badly need an historical ecology of sea monsters to determine the pristine abundances and sizes of megafauna before they were fished, and to provide the basic data for modelling their former ecological interactions with other, smaller species and their effect on biological habitats so that we can figure out what we have lost and decide what to do about it if we want to. We still have that chance."5

The Census of Marine Life (http://www.coml.org/coml.htm), initiated in 2000 as a decade-long international scientific stock-taking of the diversity, distribution, and abundance of life in the sea, thus includes a historical dimension, the History of Marine Animal Populations or HMAP (http://www.hmapcoml.org/). Headquartered around the north Atlantic rim, HMAP aims to unravel "one of the great unknowns" by expanding "the realm of the known and knowable" about past marine animal populations through fostering close collaboration between scientists and historians to determine (i) changes in stock diversity, distribution, and abundance over the past 2000 years, (2) the factors driving change, (3) the biological and anthropogenic significance of change, and (4) the role of marine resources in the development of human societies.6

Five years on, the project boasts twelve interdisciplinary research teams working on the history of marine ecosystems around the world, though heavily weighted in favor of the north Atlantic and northwest Pacific.7 The centerpiece of these collective labors to date has been the development of an online open-access database currently comprising time series of commercial catches for some seventy-three species of fish and mammal extending to over a quarter of a million records covering the period i6u-2ooo.8 Much more ambitiously though, HMAP also is actively engaged in forging new disciplines of "marine environmental history" and "historical marine ecology" through the training of graduate students in its summer schools and postgraduate programs.

Through its project teams, annual meetings, and training programs, HMAP thus provides a unique opportunity for environmental historians to engage in interdisciplinary praxis with scientists in a collaborative environment of mutual learning. For a field which prides itself on its activist, interdisciplinary, and transnational traditions, environmental historians have been slow to respond and, while broadening their inquiry to encompass all the continents, have almost entirely ignored the other seven tenths of the planet's surface that are sea. The tawdry response to the HMAP program, now already half gone, may also owe something to the way it conceives the relationship between the disciplines: "At the root of establishing ... collaboration between humanists and scientists is dealing with the fundamental issue of events in time. Clearly in the natural world there are things that repeat themselves-that is why we have models. Yet in order to understand the complex interactions between humans and nature we need to understand the contexts within which events unfold. Thus statistics, interpreted for context, blended with modeled nature, can help us understand the history of the interactions between humans and marine ecosystems. It is the interface of context with strong repeatable relationships that we are after.9

HMAP's primary focus on quantification and building a historical database has tended to restrict "context" to the verification of historical time series and rendered the humanists the data serfs of "scientist" model lords. Indeed, there is something quaintly Victorian about HMAP's Rankean search for reliable facts to be pressed into the service of positivist science, which flies in the face of much of the developments in the past few decades in historical inquiry, not least the historicization of both science and nature as context-dependent cultural constructs.10 The unquestioning acceptance of the "large marine ecosystems" and "models" that HMAP so diligently documents and serves is its Achilles heel." To make only the most obvious point: The current crisis in the world's oceans has unfolded at a massively accelerated rate in the twentieth century during the disciplinary lifetime of modern marine science and actively facilitated by its abstracted notions of nature as model.12 It is thus hard to see how adding more data to shift model baselines is going to solve a problem which modelling was deeply complicit in creating. That the limits of a naive empiricism have begun to dawn on HMAP itself is reflected in the recent recognition that much about "oceans past" will remain forever "unknowable."13

That is not to suggest that the humanists within HMAP have been entirely silent about the unexamined

cultural assumptions of the project, but that their critique has tended to be marginalized by the thrall of marine science.14 What is urgently required are more mainstream environmental histories of the sea in the critical interdisciplinary tradition pioneered by Arthur McEvoy twenty years ago and most recently revived by Jay Taylor.15 The HMAP program offers a rich array of intellectual talent and data with which to pursue such inquiry, but environmental historians might also usefully broaden their traditional notion of "interdisciplinary" away from a narrow obsession with science to encompass other social-science disciplines where the project of historicizing the ocean is already well advanced.16 If Donald Worster called sixteen years ago for environmental historians to get mud on their shoes, now is the time for them to get their feet wet.170

Enlarge 200%
Enlarge 400%

[Photograph]
USDA Mascot Woodsy Owl, September 1971.

[Footnote]
NOTES
1. See, for example, Louis W. Botsford, et al., "The Management of Fisheries and Marine Ecosystems," Science 277 (25 July 1997): 509-15; Daniel Pauly, et al., "Fishing Down Marine Food Webs," Science 279 (6 February 1998): 860-63; and Jeremy B. C. Jackson, et al., "Historical Overfishing and the Recent Collapse of Coastal Ecosystems," Science 293 (27 July 2001): 629-38.
2. Daniel Pauly, "Anecdotes and the Shifting Baseline Syndrome of Fisheries," TREE to (October 1995): 430.
3. Jeremy B. C. Jackson, "Reefs since Columbus," Coral Reefs 16 (Supplement, 1997): 823.
4. Jackson, et al., "Historical Overfishing," 629.
5. Jeremy B. C. Jackson and Enric Sala, "Unnatural Oceans," Scientia Marina 65 (Supplement 2, 2001): 281.
6. The HMAP "institutional bases" are the Centre for Maritime and Regional Studies, University of Southern Denmark (www.cmrs.dk); Maritime Historical Studies Centre, University of Hull (www.hull.ac.uk/history/MHSC/mhschome.html); and Departments of Natural Resources and History, University of New Hampshire (www.unh.edu/urnr.html and www.unh.edu/ur-hist.html). See http://www.hmapcoml.org/. For a fuller statement of the HMAP vision and research agenda, see Poul Holm, "History of Marine Animal Populations: A Global Research Program of the Census of Marine Life" Oceanologica Acta 25 (2003): 207-11.
7. The twelve HMAP projects focus on the North Sea and Baltic, White, and Barent seas, Caribbean Sea, north Pacific, northwest Atlantic, Mediterranean, Black Sea, southwest African Shelf, southeast Asia, southwest Pacific, southeast Australian Shelf, and world whaling. see Paul Holm, Tim D. Smith, and David J. Starkey, eds., The Exploited Seas: New Directions for Marine Environmental History (St. Johns, Newfoundland: International Maritime Economic History Association, 2001); and http:// www.hmapcoml.org/Default.asp?ID=3 for details and research outputs.
8. See http://www.hmapcoml.org/Default.asp?ID=37or http://www.hull.ac.uk/history/ MHSC/hmapUH.htm.
9. See http://www.hmapcoml.org/.
10. On ecology, see, for example, Donald Worster, Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Peder Anker, Imperial Ecology: Environmental Order in the British Empire, 1895-1945 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). On nature, see William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 69-90.
11. For a non-specialist introduction to the large marine ecosystem concept, see Lewis M. Alexander, "Large

Marine Ecosystems: A New Focus for Marine Resources Management," Marine Policy 17 (1993): 186-98.
12. See John R. McNeill, Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century World (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 237-51.
13. See conference announcement "Oceans Past: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the History of Marine Animal Populations," HMAP Conference, 24-27 October 2005, hotel Comwell, Kolding, Denmark at http://www.hmapcoml.org/Default.asp?ID=194.
14. For a recent example, see conference program and abstracts "Environmental History and the Oceans," Carlsberg Academy, Copenhagen, 2-5 June 2004 at http:// www.hmapcoml.org/Default.asp?ID=215.
15. See Arthur F. McEvoy, The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and Law in the California Fisheries, 1850-1980 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and Joseph E. Taylor, Making Salmon: An Environmental History of the Northwest Fisheries Crisis (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).
16. See, for example, Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Philip E. Steinberg , The Social Construction of the Ocean (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun, eds., Sea Changes: Historicizing the Ocean (New York: Routledge, 2004).
17. Donald Worster, "Appendix: Doing Environmental History," in The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History, ed. Donald Worster and Alfred W. Crosby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 289.

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