86. However, there were also exceptions. In a remote northeastern region of Kainuu, where widdendies started fairly late, widdendies were not conspicuously poverty-stricken at the turn of nineteenth and twentieth centuries compared to other local occupational groups. Samuli Paulaharju, Kainuun maan letkakansatettua Kassianin kalenda, (Helsinki: Tietoaani Kirjat 1922), 175-140.

87. Collier with Dudley, Community Forestry Case Study Series 6, 70; see e.g. Hurst, Rainforest Politics, 181-182; Peluso, Community Forestry Case Study Series 8, 65-66.

88. Conklin, Farmer Agriculture, 136-137; the population density figures for Region 4, to which the island of Mindoro belongs, vary considerably; according to Kummert (Deforestation in the Philippines, 79) in 1914 there were 56 persons/km² and in 1950 157 persons/km² whereas according to Cruz (in Man, Agriculture and the Tropical Forest, 115) population density of Region 4 in 1930 was 25 persons/km² and in 1970 95 persons/km².

89. Dayak is a collective name referring to the tribal peoples of Borneo. Sunderland and Rondono, Rates and Causes of Deforestation in Indonesia, Table 7; Collier with Dudley, Community Forestry Case Study Series 6, 63-70.

90. From 1840 to 1910, the average population density grew from 44 to 0.4 inhabitants per square km. Annuaire statistique de Finlande 1929 (Helsinki: Bureau central de statistique de Finlände 1929).

91. Lynch, Man, Agriculture and the Tropical Forest, 200-202; Peluso, Community Forestry Case Study Series 8, 44, 57-58.

92. The law on private forests includes reservations that allow widdendies in certain favorable conditions. Yksisormetuki 1928, Helsinki 1928, 3-2.

93. Hurst, Rainforest Politics, 7-8, 12.

94. See also Mackinnon et al., The Ecology of Kalmantaan, 375; for the impact of chainaws see Peluso, Community Forestry Case Study Series 8, 61-62; Heikinheimo, Kasvuvivien vaikutus Suomen maastoon, 27; Collins et al., Conservation Atlas, 71.

95. E.g. Jordan, An Amazonian Rainforest as mentioned before, e.g. Pyne, Vestal Fire—An Environmental History, 271.


97. See e.g. Doye, Swidden Agricuture in Indonesia, 5.

98. Aughen, Shifting Cultivation and "Deforestation," 171-172. See also Collins et al., Conservation Atlas, 71; Mackinnon et al., The Ecology of Kalmantaan, 370-372.

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What Really Matters in History?
Environmental Perspectives on Modern America

Adam Rome

What really matters in history? In the introduction to Perspectives on Modern America: Making Sense of The Twentieth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), editor Harvard Sitkoff addresses that question with unusual candor. To organize the conference that laid the foundation for the book, Sitkoff writes, the history department at the University of New Hampshire considered "the people, ideas, events, and developments that most mattered, and that most brought us to where we are now." Fourteen topics stood out. Perspectives on Modern America thus includes essays by fourteen scholars on the twentieth-century history of the presidency, liberalism, conservatism, foreign policy, work, poverty, consumption, the West, the South, African Americans, ethnicity and immigration, women, religion, and culture. That list of topics impressed the book’s first readers. "Comprehensive and engaging," William Chafe writes in a blur for the collection, “these essays offer a challenging overview of the major themes and contradictions of twentieth-century American history.” For an environmental historian, however, Perspectives on Modern America is a great disappointment.

Because the book does not include a chapter on environmental history, Perspectives on Modern America provides no insight into some of the most far-reaching transformations of the twentieth century. In 1900, for example, oil still was a relatively small part of the American economy—but, in the next fifty years, oil became the nation’s principal source of energy. Oil also became a basic ingredient in the manufacture of thousands of products, including plastics, agricultural chemicals, and clothing. The rise of the oil economy had profound consequences. The production and consumption of oil contributed to almost all of the most pressing environmental problems of the twentieth century. In countless ways, the ability to use a powerful and cheap source of energy transformed daily life—what we eat, where we live, how we work, and what we do for fun. The rise of the oil economy also changed many of the structures of American society. Without some understanding of the history of energy use, scholars and students cannot truly compre-
the Sun Belt, or the unprecedented affluence of the decades after World War II. The list could go on.1

The disappointment goes deeper than the neglect of some critical topics. "If we had our way," William Cronon wrote in 1990, "historians would be no more willing to ignore questions about ecological context—about nature—that they would questions about gender or class or race." Yet Perspectives on Modern America suggests that many historians still do not recognize the value of an environmental perspective. In addition to opening up new areas of inquiry, environmental history provides a new way of seeing the terrain we think we already know well. It enables scholars to reconsider both the causes and the consequences of important historical changes. Though the contributors to Perspectives on Modern America make little use of the insights of environmental history, an environmental perspective adds to our understanding of every topic considered in the book. Let me give a few examples.2

In the chapter on the presidency, William Leuchtenburg notes the environmental initiatives of several presidents. Theodore Roosevelt used "the bully pulpit" to promote the conservation movement. Without congressional authorization, William Taft withheld land from the public domain, and the Supreme Court upheld Taft's action in a decision that affirmed the wide scope of presidential authority. For Lyndon Johnson, legislation to improve the quality of the environment was essential to building a "Great Society." Richard Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency by executive order. Jimmy Carter acted to save wilderness in Alaska, clean up the nation's most hazardous waste dumps, and encourage energy conservation. Leuchtenburg might have noted Franklin Roosevelt's keen interest in the use and abuse of natural resources. But what is the point of those examples? The history of the presidency is a way to consider the history of the federal government, and environmental history has played a key role in the growth of the state throughout the twentieth century.

Indeed, the environmental-management state deserves to join the national-security state and the welfare state as a central concern of political historians. In the twentieth century, after decades of selling and giving away the public domain, the federal government assumed a major role in managing forests and grasslands. The government has done much to make possible the growth of outdoor recreation. At different times, for different reasons, countless Americans have turned to the state for help in conquering nature. They have asked the government to predict the weather, control wild fires, protect cattle and sheep from predators, and keep floodwaters at bay. In the 1930s, the government sought to promote economic development in the South and the West by constructing vast systems of dams. Over the course of the twentieth century, the government also has worked to slow or halt the degradation of the environment. The Soil Conservation Service has given advice to millions of farmers, while the regulations of the Environmental Protection Agency have affected almost every business in the nation. The need for sanitary services also spurred the growth of city government.3

The environmental-management state grew most rapidly during the century's
political threats. That surely is true. But the argument would be more compelling if McMahon considered the history of resource consumption. The nation’s growing dependence on imported raw materials was not inevitable. Neither was the decision to make continued access to foreign resources a diplomatic and military priority.

At the start of the century, Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot urged Americans to conserve resources at home in order to ensure the nation’s future as a great power abroad. In very different ways, Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt both sought to advance the conservation cause. The demands of World War II led to dramatic efforts to conserve materials. The beginning of the Cold War intensified anxieties about the nation’s supply of strategic resources. Harry Truman appointed a President’s Commission on Materials Use. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Conservation Foundation and Resources for the Future were established by well-connected philanthropists to provide expert advice to citizens and policymakers. But the advocates of government-planned conservation lost the postwar debate about the best way to ensure that the country never lacked the “resources for freedom.” The nation’s leaders decided to bank instead on the cornucopian promise of technological progress. That decision went hand-in-hand with a more aggressive foreign policy.

To truly write the history of America’s engagement with the rest of the world, scholars need to consider the impact of American policy abroad, not just at home. The work of several environmental historians can serve as a model. In *Invisible Appetite*, Richard Tucker shows how Americans have transformed the forest landscapes of tropical nations across the globe. Especially in the first half of the twentieth century, American entrepreneurs and corporations worked aggressively to develop foreign plantations for the production of coffee, sugar, bananas, rubber, beef, and timber. The United States government often acted to promote and protect the interests of American firms abroad. The tariff laws helped to make large-scale deforestation profitable. The United States also intervened militarily and diplomatically to aid American-owned plantations—in central America, most famously, but also in Liberia, which was dominated for years by Firestone.

John Perkins offers another important example in *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution*. In the aftermath of World War II, a variety of intellectuals and policymakers argued that American national security required an effort to stop the cycle of population growth, resource exhaustion, hunger, and political instability around the world. That argument prompted the Point Four plan—a Cold War program of technical and scientific assistance initiated by President Harry Truman—as well as efforts by the Rockefeller and Ford foundations to modernize agriculture in developing countries. Though those initiatives are not as well known as the Marshall Plan or the Peace Corps, they were critical to the success of “the green revolution,” which had profound social and environmental consequences.

In the chapter on labor, Kevin Boyle promises to explore “all those places where Americans made goods, made money, made homes, made lives for themselves and their families.” Yet Boyle neglects the leading occupation at the start of the twentieth century: because the transformation of American agriculture in the last one hundred years is a story of world-historic significance. Decade after decade, the adoption of new technologies led to a revolution in the nature of farming. Hybrid seeds in the 1920s, tractors in the 1930s, chemical insecticides, herbicides, and fertilizers in the 1940s, and aquifer-fed irrigation systems in the 1950s—all allowed fewer people to produce more grain, more fiber, more meat. But the new productivity came at a tremendous environmental cost. The agricultural revolution also had profound social consequences. The greatest change came from 1940 to 1970. At a time when the U.S. population was booming, roughly 80,000 people left farming every year, and the number of Americans living on farms declined precipitously. Now only about a half million farms account for the overwhelming majority of the nation’s agricultural output. Though the outmigration from the rural South has received considerable attention, social historians have barely begun to tell the story of the agricultural revolution elsewhere.

In passing, Doyle notes that workers in 1900 typically had to endure a vile environment both at work and at home, but Doyle does not consider the role of organized labor in the century’s campaigns to minimize environmental hazards. That subject has attracted a lot of attention recently. At times, unions have protested against pollution. As more workers took up hunting and fishing in the 1920s and 1930s, several unions lobbied for legislation to stop strip mining and clean up rivers. Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers was a prominent supporter of the first Earth Day in 1970. Yet a good bit of the recent work on workers and the environment points to the limits of unions as a force for social change. Throughout the century, workers often have sided with their employers in opposing demands to reduce industrial pollution. In some cases, union leaders who sought to challenge polluters were treated as disloyal by the union leadership. For a number of reasons, the record of organized labor in dealing with the environmentalills of the workplace also is mixed.

At the start of the chapter on poverty, Jacqueline Jones sketches a number of factors that explain “who is poor, when, where, and why.” She surely is right that economic and technological change, shifts in state power and social-welfare policy, and patterns of immigration and migration all have shaped the history of poverty. Except in passing, however, Jones does not acknowledge that poverty also can result from ecological change. She notes that overfishing, deforestation, and drought have impoverished some people. But her analysis would be much sharper if she drew more from the work of environmental historians. In Appalachia, for example, the destruction of the forest did not just mean that people no longer could make money from timber. Deforestation set in motion a series of environmental changes that undermined the subsistence economy of the region. Eroding soil from bare hills polluted streams, fires and floods became more common, and game habitat declined. As a result, fishing, hunting, and small-scale agriculture all became more difficult. The story of Native American poverty is similarly complicated. To understand the twentieth-century struggles of the Navajo, Northern Utes, Hopis, and Tohono O’odhams, Richard White and David Rich Lewis argue, historians must
An environmental perspective also would enrich the discussion of the consequences of poverty, because the poor have disproportionately borne the burden of environmental degradation. That was true at the start of the twentieth century, and that still is true today. But the social geography of pollution has changed over time. In Environmental Inequalities—a study of Gary, Indiana, in the decades after World War II—Andrew Hurley shows that brilliantly. At work, the exposure to toxic hazards followed a clear hierarchy: Black workers bore the greatest burden, white-collar workers the least. But the inequities were not nearly so great outside the factory. In 1930, the worst air was downtown, where everyone stopped except the city’s black residents. Though the neighborhoods closest to the steel complex housed blue-collar white families, the city’s black section and one of the city’s elite neighborhoods also suffered periodically from horrid smoke and fumes. Almost everyone in Gary drank water of terrible quality, and white people of both classes often encountered pollution while swimming, fishing, or playing. By 1950, however, the map had changed dramatically. In the intervening decades, the steel executives moved to healthier neighborhoods at the city’s edge, while black families could escape the overcrowded ghetto only by moving into Gary’s most polluted districts.

As Ted Steinberg argues in Acts of God, the poorest and least powerful Americans also have suffered disproportionately from natural disasters. In the 1966 earthquake in San Francisco, for example, the loss of life was greatest in the city’s overcrowded Chinatown. Because land in floodplains is cheap, the poor often have lived in places subject to inundation. The cheapest forms of housing have proven most vulnerable to the high winds of tornadoes and hurricanes. The extremes of summer and winter also have hit the poor most brutally. Yet the distribution of disaster relief has favored the better-off. When the federal government has cut programs that guard against disasters, the cutbacks often have come mostly at the expense of people with little property to lose. For Steinberg, therefore, “the unnatural history of natural disaster” is part and parcel of the history of social injustice.

Because the environmental history of consumption still is relatively unexplored terrain, Elizabeth Cohen’s chapter on “the Consumer Republic” could not have considered the relationship between consumption and the environment in any depth. Yet the subject is rich. Susan Strasser’s Waste and Want makes that clear. In the history of trash, Strasser argues, the twentieth century was a watershed. Before 1920, most Americans were adept at reusing, repairing, and recycling things. Itemant peddlers took rags and bones from customers in trade for manufactured goods. Poor children helped to support their families by scavenging city streets for food, fuel, and usable materials. All but the wealthiest women knew how to sew and how to use kitchen scraps. In the twentieth century, however, the habits of thrift eroded. The triumph of consumer culture was tied to the rise of disposable products. Decisions that once seemed wasteful became driving forces in the economy. People bought new cars and appliances to keep up with the latest fashions in design. At home, a new ideal of convenience encouraged families to toss more stuff in the garbage. The affluent society came at a tremendous environmental cost.

My work on the history of the tract house offers a similar lesson. In the years after World War II, the use of new methods of mass production allowed builders to meet an unprecedented demand for housing. The construction of relatively cheap houses in the fast-growing suburbs helped to booming the economy. Yet the growth of suburbia was not entirely a blessing. In addition to causing social problems, the spread of tract housing exacerbated a host of environmental ills. The environmental impacts of suburban development soon became subjects of public debate. By the mid-1960s, the sprawl of the tract had provoked hundreds of grassroots campaigns to stop “the rape of the land.” The suburban boom thus played a key role in the emergence of the environmental movement.

As the story of tract housing suggests, an environmental perspective is important in understanding the politics of consumption. During the Progressive and New Deal years, Cohen argues, reformers often saw consumers as protectors of the public good. Then the ideal of consumers as citizens gave way to a more narrowly self-interested conception in the decades after World War II. Yet the history of environmentalism complicates Cohen’s argument. In countless cities and suburbs, women organized as consumers in the late 1960s and early 1970s to improve the environment. The rise of environmentalism contributed at the same time to the resurgence of food cooperatives. For many people, as Warren Belasco argues in Appetite for Change, decisions about what to eat became political. The degradation of the environment also was a major issue for Ralph Nader. In a chapter of Unsafe at Any Speed, the 1965 book that made Nader famous as a consumer advocate, Nader attacked the automobile industry for polluting the air. By 1970, he was one of the nation’s leading proponents of anti-pollution legislation, and he defined the issue in consumer terms. Irresponsible corporations were forcing Americans to consume deadly pollutants. Though Nader failed to transform the nation’s political economy, the conjunction of consumerism and environmentalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s had significant consequences.

In the essay on the West, Peggy Pascoe draws on the work of a number of environmental historians, including Patricia Nelson Limerick, Richard White, and Donald Worster. That is not surprising. Environmental historians have played a major role in the rise of “the new Western history.” But Pascoe only incorporates one facet of the literature on the diverse ways westerners have related to nature. Because she is concerned with the social history of the West, she makes good use of recent work that has analyzed the class and racial biases in the conservation and environmental movements. In the national parks, she writes, “officials worked to remove Indians from sites they preferred to present to the public as pristine wildernesses.” She concludes that—despite the democratic rhetoric of the founders of the conservation movement—the Bureau of Reclamation and the Forest Service ultimately worked most closely with large enterprises. She also argues that environmental arguments have justified policies of social exclusion in cities and suburbs.

But what is distinctive about the West? For Pascoe, that question is beside the point. The questions she wants to answer are ultimately American questions, she writes, and Western history is just a convenient way to get a handle on the big story.
however, the idea of a region also is a way to acknowledge a fundamental truth: Place matters. In Patricia Limerick's "top-ten list" of reasons to consider the West a distinct entity, for example, environmental factors predominate. Following Donald Worster's lead, Limerick begins with the aridity and semi-aridity of much western land. In Limerick's view, the West also has had "a particularly dramatic" dependence on "the boom-and-bust economies of extractive industries" — mining, logging, ranching, oil drilling, and commercial farming. The West has most of the land still owned by the federal government, including a host of national forests, parks, monuments, and grasslands. Because much of the Western desert is sparsely settled, the region has become the dumping ground for a disproportionate share of the nation's toxic and radioactive wastes. The spectacular scenery of the West also earns an honorable mention from Limerick. The region's salability has attracted millions of migrants.1

Though environmental historians of the South have given most of their attention to the period before 1900, an environmental perspective would enrich Nancy MacLean's discussion of the rise of the Sun Belt. The rapid growth of the South since World War II is inconceivable without air conditioning. The decline of the Cotton Kingdom was partly due to environmental factors. MacLean briefly discusses the exhaustion of southern soils. But she does not consider the complex impact of the boll weevil — the great scourge of the cotton fields. She also misses one part of the South's appeal to outside investors. She points to anti-union policies, tax breaks, and infrastructure improvements, but she does not mention the willingness of southern leaders to tolerate levels of pollution that were increasingly intolerable elsewhere. In the postwar decades, the South became a region of pine plantations and paper mills, and the paper industry was especially destructive to the environment. But the pollution did not dissuade the region's boosters. Even in 1970, when roughly 22 million Americans celebrated the first Earth Day, Alabama Governor George Wallace smiled at the stub of a new paper mill twenty miles from the state capitol. "Yeah, that's the smell of prosperity," he told a reporter. "She does smell, sweet, don't she?"2

The scholarly literature on African Americans and the environment also is relatively undeveloped. But the subject deserves attention. As the novels of Zora Neale Hurston suggest, the descendants of slaves often had an intimate "folk" knowledge of nature, and historians still need to consider the ways that knowledge shaped African-American history in the twentieth century. A recent dissertation by Dianne Glave, "A start. In the early part of the century, Glave argues, African-American farmers and gardeners worked to combine folk traditions of land use with the scientific principles taught by agricultural extension agents."3

Though environmental historians still have not devoted enough attention to the issue of race, the work on the environmental movement already can enrich the story of the African-American struggle for equality—the principal theme of Charles Payne's chapter on African Americans. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when most civil-rights leaders argued that African Americans did not yet have the luxury of caring about the environment, Richard Hatcher became one of the nation's first environmentalists. For Hatcher, efforts to control rats and cockroaches in African-American neighborhoods went hand-in-hand with campaigns against industrial pollution of the air and water. The Hatcher coalition only lasted a few years, yet the charge of "environmental racism" gave renewed force to the civil-rights movement in the 1980s and 1990s. Grassroots activists in a number of African-American communities protest to build waste dumps and other polluting factories nearby. Activists also argue that segregation in the housing market often meant that African Americans faced a painful choice — to remain in overcrowded ghettos or to move to single-family houses in polluted neighborhoods.4

Like the environmental history of African Americans, the relationship of immigrants to the land is only beginning to receive scholarly attention. For most historians of immigration, the countryside hardly exists. The great stage for conflict over ethnic identity, assimilation, and citizenship is the city. The author of the chapter on immigration — Gary Gerstle — is no exception. He began his career with a study of immigrants and the New Deal in the city of Woosocket, Rhode Island. But the work of a few environmental historians is a corrective to the overwhelmingly urban bias of immigration history. In The Fisherman's Problem, Arthur McKee demonstrates that the rise of state regulation of fisheries in California was tied to a virulent campaign to drive the Chinese out of the fishing business. Though the effort began in the 1870s and 1880s, when non-Chinese fishermen joined with state scientists to blame the Chinese for declines in the catch, the campaign did not end until the 1900s. But the California fisheries continued to decline after the Chinese were driven from business. In McKee's judgment, the state laws serve only to enhance the competitive position of other fishing groups and to establish precedents for more ambitious efforts to regulate the fisheries. As Louis Warren shows in The Hunter's Game, the first decades of the twentieth century also brought violent conflict between immigrants and natives over hunting rights. In Pennsylvania, Italian immigrants often hunted after work to provide meat for their tables. They considered songbirds a delicacy. To the well-to-do members of sporting clubs, however, "alien" hunters were barbaric, wasteful, and greedy despoilers of the beauty of the hunt. The sporting groups successfully supported legislation to make songbird hunting illegal — and Italian hunters then harassed and even attacked the state's game wardens.5

An environmental perspective also gives insight into a central theme of Sara Evans's chapter on women's lives — the long struggle of women to claim space in the public sphere. At the start of the century, when professional opportunities for women were rare, a few pioneers took advantage of traditional expectations about a woman's place in society to make careers as sanitary experts. Club women also campaigned to improve the environment. To ensure that their children and children's children would have the resources needed to build good homes, they worked to conserve forests. In the nation's cities, women were the most vigorous advocates for smokeless skies, clean water, pure food, and spacious parks. The reformers justified their efforts as "municipal housekeeping." As one woman wrote, "We should cer-
clean. The air should be clean. The individual houses and premises, the schools, the places of public assembly, the places of trade, the factories, the places where foods are prepared, sold, served, should be clean. There should be sanitary collection and disposal of all the wastes that inevitably accumulate wherever human beings have a home and find habitation.97

The promise that women would wash away the environmental ills of the nation even played a part in the campaign for women's suffrage. A 1913 cartoon perfectly illustrates the argument. The left side of the cartoon is a nightmarish vision of life in a city where women cannot vote. The sky is pitch black, and thick clouds of smoke streams are issuing from the factories and the factories produce no smoke. The street is dark, too, except for the entrances to the cheap theaters, the Sporty Venus Company, and the red light dive. While the children work inside the factories, a throng of men revels outside the saloons; the only women on the street are prostitutes. In contrast, the right side of the cartoon is a bright, beautiful picture of white clouds in the clear sky. Trees line the walkway along the river that divides the two worlds. Near the gate to the public playgrounds, mothers point out flowers to children. The street is full of families, with children sitting by a fountain, rolling a hoop, and playing with a dog. The sanitary homes and factories produce no smoke. A school, a museum, and a library grace the hill. The bridge over the river is crowded with white slavers and child exploiters—but a woman's hand reaches down from the heavens to block the way with a bullet marked "Women's Vote."98

The environmental activism of women continued long after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. In the 1920s and 1930s, middle-class women were a critical force in the emergence of the environmental movement. In some cases, they worked through old organizations, especially the League of Women Voters. More often, women formed ad hoc groups to battle pollution, save open spaces, or protect wildlife. Like the municipal housekeepers early in the century, the activists of the 1920s and 1930s often drew the imagery of concerns for housewives and mothers. For some college-educated women, environmental activism resolved a tension between traditional expectations and fulfilled ambitions. Because they acted to protect the home and the family, they could enter the public sphere—though they could be more than "just" housewives—without rejecting the claims of domesticity. For other women, however, environmental activism was the first step toward careers outside the home. The leadership of women in grassroots environmental organizations was consciousness raising. By demonstrating that women could master technical bodies of knowledge, the activists of the 1920s and 1930s countered the stereotype of female emotionalism. Though they seldom considered themselves feminists, they helped to advance the feminist cause.99

In the chapter on religion, Paul Boyer notes several ways that the environmental movement has shaped belief. He mentions the "greening of Protestantism" in the 1960s. He also includes Gaia worship in a list of new-traditional forms of religious expression. For Boyer, the larger point in both cases is the incredible adaptability and diversity of religion in modern America. Though a variety of commentaries see secularization as the great trend of the twentieth century, Boyer...
Of course, escape was just one of the many meanings of nature in the twentieth century. Americans also have found in nature ideas about social and political relationships. In the wildlife television shows of the 1950s, Gregg Mitman argues, nature “legitimated the family and the church as central pillars of democracy.” As Jennifer Price shows in *Flight Maps*, arguments about feathered hats and plastic flamingos reveal much about the construction of gender and class identities. The history of attitudes about nature is much more than the history of environmental ethics. I could give more examples, but I hope I have already made my point. We need to do more to persuade our colleagues that environmental history is vitally important. Whether the subject is foreign policy or poverty, politics or religion, culture or social relations, regional identity or economic growth, the insights of environmental history can add to the scholarly literature. In some cases, an environmental perspective adds new complexity to old arguments. In other cases, an environmental perspective fundamentally revises our understanding of the past. The environment should be a basic category of historical analysis.


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**Notes**


makes the argument about social exclusion and suburban environmentalism in "City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles" (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 217-230. Many other environmental historians have written about the twentieth-century West—William Cronon, Hal Rothman, Dan Flores, Nancy Langston, Mark Harvey, Susan Schreiner, Chet Miller, and William deBakey, for example. Much of the work about agriculture and the environment also is Western history.


An Environmental History of Great Britain: From 10,000 Years Ago to the Present. By I. G. Simmons, Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press. 2001. xii + 400 pp. Appendices, notes, biographies, glossary, selected bibliography, index. Cloth $82.00, paper $32.00.

Critics sometimes claim that historical scholarship has become monopolized by studies that are obsessively narrow in focus and that academics have abandoned the task of synthesis to others. Several recent works of environmental history, however, serve to refute this charge. Coming a year after the publication of J. R. McNeill's sweeping global environmental history of the twentieth century, Something New under the Sun (WW. Norton, 2000), I. G. Simmons's equally ambitious book, An Environmental History of Great Britain, explores people's interactions with (and ideas about) the environment in one part of the world since the end of the last ice age.

Simmons, an emeritus professor of geography at the University of Durham, has written a book that is wide-ranging not merely chronologically, but also conceptually. Although there exists a long and valuable tradition of scholarship by historians and geographers that examines Britain's past from an environmental perspective, such works have generally employed a restricted focus (agricultural history, urban history, and so on). Simmons distances himself from such approaches, including the one that W. G. Hoskins made famous in The Making of the English Landscape (Hodder and Stoughton, 1955), by considering the environment in a much broader sense and seeking to explain how its constituent elements fit together.

Drawing from an impressive range of sources—including even poetry and music—Simmons argues that the histories of people and the environment in Britain are inextricably connected, and that virtually every square centimeter of the island's surface has been altered as a result. While such a thesis is far from revolutionary, the details make for a fascinating account, and he does an excellent job navigating the complexities and paradoxes of this history. He notes, for example, that moorlands, which constitute some of the most cherished "natural" landscapes in Britain, were in many places covered with trees until humans began removing them about 4,000 years ago.

Each chapter provides a comprehensive overview of a particular period, with topics organized into sections such as climate, landforms, energy, urban settlement, and international linkages. Useful features include an extensive set of maps, statistical tables, and illustrations, text boxes that make connections between historical