

ASEH Awards

The following awards were presented at our conference in St. Paul:

Distinguished Service Award

Hal K. Rothman

George Perkins Marsh Prize for Best Book

James C. McCann, *Maize and Grace: Africa's Encounter with a New World Crop: 1500 – 2000*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Alice Hamilton Prize for Best Article Outside *Environmental History*

Mark Fiege, "The Weedy West: Mobile Nature, Boundaries, and Common Space in the Montana Landscape." *Western Historical Quarterly* (Spring 2005).

Leopold-Hidy Prize for Best Article in *Environmental History*

Gregg Mitman, "In Search of Health: Landscape and Disease in American Environmental History," (April 2005).

Rachel Carson Prize for Best Dissertation

Liza Piper, "Harnessing the Wet West: Environment and Industrial Order on the Large Lakes of Subarctic Canada, 1921 – 1960." York University.

More information about these awards, including comments and photos, will be available on ASEH's new website by May (see <aseh.net>).

Award Submissions for 2006

This year ASEH's prize committees will evaluate submissions (published books and articles and completed dissertations) that appear between November 1, 2005 and October 31, 2006. Please send three copies of each submission by *November 3, 2006* to:

Lisa Mighetto
119 Pine Street, Suite 301
Seattle, WA 98101

If you have questions, contact Lisa at
<mighetto@hrassoc.com>

Photos of St. Paul Conference

ASEH and the Forest History Society met in St. Paul last month. More than 500 people attended, making this meeting one of ASEH's largest. *Photos on pages 1 and 3 courtesy of Steve Anderson, Lisa Mighetto, and Hal Rothman.*



Participants in the birding field trip pause at the Mississippi. Next year we meet downriver (see page 5 for information on our Baton Rouge conference).



At a reception honoring the journal, Steve Anderson (pictured right) presented plaques of appreciation to Adam Rome, outgoing editor, and Ed Russell (pictured left), outgoing book review editor.



Hal Rothman (seated left), recipient of ASEH's Distinguished Service Award, at the journal reception with Carolyn Merchant (pictured left), Bill Cronon, and Susan Flader.

From the President's Desk

The Only Good Advice

The only good investment advice remains, buy cheap and sell dear. The only good counsel on how to do research belongs in the same league of homilies: where there's a will, there's a way. I find an on-site visit a good prod to willfulness.

So flying to Athens to attend a European fire symposium - they are held only every six years - seemed like a good idea. (Even better, a colleague invited me to lecture in Crete afterwards.) The symposium occurred under various U.N. auspices, primarily the FAO, so the Greek Ministry of Forests staged it with full regalia at a public conference facility for such events that allowed for simultaneous translation. I nestled into a chair along a wall. But when the delegates assembled around the enormous conference table there was an absence louder than any presence. The United States - widely recognized as the global leader in wildland fire - had sent no one. At coffee break the shakedown began.

The FAO host, a Canadian, led a small delegation to plead - demand - that I become the official American delegate. I have no formal standing, I replied. It doesn't matter, they said; it is inconceivable, a monstrous breach of protocol, that the Americans are not present; I need only warm the chair. Not being educated in fire diplomacy, I had no exit strategy and agreed. I sat between

the Turks and the Russians and stared across the table at the Albanians and Bulgarians before sinking into my customary slouch. I snapped to attention, however, when, after formally receiving me, the conference proceeded to name me one of four discussion leaders and symposium rapporteur. At lunch the FAO host informed me that this meant I got to help him write up the final report. I'd been had.

It got worse when the smiling head of security introduced himself, informed me that he had a cousin in Chicago, and told me not to worry, that I was now under his care. The armored limo would be waiting for me after we dismissed for the day. Say again? There is a problem, he explained. Terrorists. Not Greek terrorists - he was very emphatic about that. No, foreign terrorists. Now that I was the official representative of the U.S. I was a potential target. But I was not to worry. His agency had become much better at protecting its charges.

I would be escorted between the hotel and conference in an armored limo. There would be undercover guards constantly in the hotel lobby and on my floor (had the United States announced its official delegate sooner they could have arranged for me to stay somewhere more secluded and secure; alas, they only learned this morning). I made a counterproposal. Why don't I just schlepp along with a rucksack and disguise myself as an aging student or backpacker? Besides, this is a bunch of people talking about forest fires, not nuclear weapons. He shrugged. He had his instructions. He would do his job. I should do mine.

So for three days I found myself under de facto house arrest or armed escort, and was only grudgingly allowed to exit the bus during the field trip to the Peloponnesus, and then had to stay after school to write up my wrongdoings. But at last the symposium adjourned, and I headed to the hotel, from where I intended the next day to visit some museums, the Acropolis, and souvenir shops. Of course, this was possible, and, naturally, I could walk if I wished, but I would need a bodyguard. He was trained. He would remain inconspicuous. (He spoke as much English as I did Greek and he may be the only Athenian who did not have a relative in the States.) Call him Andy, I was told.

My adventures with Andy continued for a day I'd be pleased not to remember. At one point, hustling to the museum, I took a wrong turn. Andy worked his way next to me, and then shouldered me until I got turned around, rather as a sheep dog might turn a stray. He did this without saying a word or looking me in the face and then dropped back to his position. Later, I found myself on a deserted street. There was no one save Andy and me. I had to walk ahead and pretend I was oblivious to the guy stalking me 20 paces back, while Andy had to behave as though the guy ahead, with whom he kept a carefully paced distance, was of absolutely no interest. All the scene lacked was Inspector Clousseau and someone in a gorilla suit.

Not long afterwards I ducked into a souvenir shop, and the clerk, with nothing else to do, struck up a conversation (she had a cousin in New York). Outside, Andy had squirreled himself into a shadowed crack between buildings, across the street, his face screened by a newspaper. Finally, having peered out the window several times, the clerk asked, "Hey, what's with your friend? He

American Society for Environmental History

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The American Society for Environmental History seeks understanding of the human experience of the environment from the perspective of history, liberal arts, and sciences. The Society encourages cross-disciplinary dialogue on every aspect of the present and past relationship of humankind to the natural environment. ASEH maintains a website at <www.aseh.net>. Contact <K.J.W.Oosthoek@newcastle.ac.uk> to discuss including material on the web page.

Items for the next newsletter should be sent by *June 23, 2006*, to:
 Lisa Mighetto, Editor, 119 Pine St., Suite 301, Seattle, WA 98101. E-mail to <mighetto@hrassoc.com>.

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The Profession

[Editor's note: This is a new column that will provide information for students and scholars new to the profession. The topics and authors will change quarterly. If you have comments or suggestions, send them to me at <mighetto@hrassoc.com>]

How to Get Published in *Environmental History*

By Mark Cioc, University of California – Santa Cruz

It is difficult to answer the question “How do I get published in *Environmental History*?” without resorting to a cliché: “Submit a cogently argued, polished, and original essay that forces readers to rethink their conceptions about the field.” Presumably all scholars are already striving to achieve that goal. Here are a few concrete suggestions that might prove more helpful.

The members of the Editorial Board are especially interested in environmental topics that resonate with other fields and subfields in the natural and human sciences. Essays that draw on more than one area of scholarly literature (the intersection of environmental history and labor history, for instance) are highly valued.

We are equally keen on ensuring that the journal remains the first choice of publication for all graduate students and recent Ph.D.s. We tend to receive two types of dissertation-based submissions: those that originated as chapters in dissertations and have been reconceived as “stand alone” essays; and those that are distillations of entire dissertations. The second type of essay is quite challenging, but also often more rewarding.

Environmental History is a refereed journal, and the most important part of the publication process is the review by internal and external readers. Reader Reports vary enormously in style, length, and sophistication, but certain critiques surface repeatedly. Three are worth enumerating here.

By far the most common critique is the “can't tell the forest for the trees” complaint: the author's head is so deeply embedded in the data and narration that he or she is not able to place the story within a larger framework or explain its broader significance. An author can typically resolve this problem by paying closer attention to the introduction and conclusion and by addressing the “so what?” question.

The second most common critique is that the “author claims too much originality and newness.” Authors often compose their essays as if they were overturning large bodies of earlier work rather than building on previous generations of literature. Only on rare occasions do outside reviewers agree. Mostly they conclude that the author has not read the previous literature carefully enough or has caricatured the conclusions of earlier researchers. Authors can resolve this problem by summarizing previous literature early in their essays and then signaling how they plan to build on, and diverge from, the earlier scholarship.

The third most common critique—the “timid conclusions” complaint—is the opposite of the second one. After spending months or years in the archives going through vast amounts of contradictory material, many scholars are hesitant to draw clear-cut conclusions or provide clear summations of their research results. This hesitancy, though understandable, comes across as wish-

washy. It also prompts reviewers to raise the “so what?” question: Does it really take twenty pages to tell us that some rural farmers in the U.S. Midwest might have been environmentally aware, while others might not have been? Or that some forest policies were perhaps somewhat more ecologically sensitive than others? Or that some historical periods may have been a bit more environmentally progressive than others? An author can resolve this problem by eliminating as many qualifiers (“might lead one to conclude,” “would suggest,” etc.) as possible and by drawing bolder conclusions.

There is no magic formula for getting published in *Environmental History* or any other scholarly journal, but authors can augment their chances by addressing these three common critiques before they submit their essays for review. Of course, it never hurts to send a “cogently argued, polished, and original essay that forces readers to rethink their conceptions about the field” either.

Check Submission Guidelines at the back of the journal and ASEH's website (see "Publications") for more information. If you have questions, contact Mark Cioc, editor, at <cioc@ucsc.edu>

The summer issue of *ASEH News* will include an article by Paul Hirt on How to Prepare for a Job Interview.



Exhibit Area, St. Paul Conference.



John Anfinson (pictured left), St. Paul Local Arrangements Committee chair, and Dave Louter, Baton Rouge Program Committee chair, confer at the ASEH Exhibit, St. Paul.

Report from the Publications Committee

In fall 2005 President Steve Pyne appointed the Publications Committee. Joseph Taylor (Simon Fraser University) was appointed chair, and Kathleen Brosnan (University of Houston) and Frank Smith (Cambridge University Press) filled out the committee. Their main task was to pursue two projects designed to raise awareness about environmental history.

The first project involved requesting the Library of Congress to create a formal entry in the LOC catalog for the field of environmental history. We contacted Beacher Wiggins, Director for Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access, with a proposal for a separate index entry and formal classification policy. Wiggins forwarded the request to Librarian William Deiss, who responded affirmatively, noting that the LOC already informally listed environmental history in the GF section with Human Ecology. The LOC's response was forwarded to Pyne and the Executive Committee, which approved the matter. The LOC confirmed the new policy in December 2005.

The second project is an effort to generate ideas about how to increase awareness of the field of environmental history. The committee invited publishers' representatives and booksellers to discuss this problem, and ten press representatives met with the committee in St. Paul. The conversation revealed little enthusiasm for engaging booksellers, which are employing fewer "book people" these days and are rapidly moving away from marketing narrow categories. Data offered by marketing departments also revealed that a majority of academic titles are sold to electronic wholesalers rather than retail outlets. Traditional bookstores play an ever declining role in creating awareness of scholarship. Promotion now

tries to create author name brands using journalists and websites. As a result, readers are more likely to learn about authors before books, and to learn so from mass media than through word of mouth.

The meeting resulted in a series of suggestions, many of which dovetail with the ASEH's website redesign (see page 7), that have been forwarded to the Executive Committee. Among the ideas that generated considerable enthusiasm were the creation of a speakers bureau, an experts list organized by names and topics, topical bibliographies for journalists and researchers, an environmental history blog, and an online guide for authors and advisors in environmental history. The aim of these proposals is to make the ASEH more accessible and serviceable to non-academic users, but to really make it work members need to think about how they can make the ASEH more useful to teachers, journalists, think tanks, and environmental organizations.

As one participant reminded the group, big visions are useful for initiating new projects, but little goals are usually more practical and rewarding. Thus we also heard suggestions for holding regular panels as ASEH conferences on subjects such as "How to Write a Publishable Book," "Thinking About Your Audience," "How to Sell Your Book," and similar topics. The committee is working with the Program Committee for Baton Rouge to turn at least some of these suggestions into reality for the next conference. In all, the committee feels like we accomplished quite a bit in the last seven months, and we are extremely grateful for the energy and ideas provided by the participants at the St. Paul meeting.

Joseph Taylor, Chair; Kathleen Brosnan; Frank Smith

In Memoriam

Our colleague Elinor Melville, the well known environmental historian of Latin America, died on Friday, March 10 in her 66th year. Elinor was a woman of the world who crossed intellectual boundaries as readily as borders. Born to Scottish parents in New Guinea, raised on a sheep station in Australia and in New Zealand, Elinor practiced her first profession, physical and occupational therapy, along the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador after migrating to Canada in 1963. Though trained as an anthropologist at the University of Michigan, she taught history and environmental studies for many years at York University in Toronto. But she was most at home in Mexico, the land of her academic research, the site of her beloved villa, and the place where her ashes will be buried.

Elinor served on the ASEH Executive Committee, and members of the Society will also remember Elinor for her book *A Plague of Sheep: Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico*, published in 1994 as an early volume in the Environmental History series from Cambridge University Press. With remarkable sensitivity to the impact of environmental change on local communities, Elinor's work documented the devastating transformation of a formerly lush valley to a desiccated and depopulated desert through the practice of misplaced pastoralism. Her interpretation of rich archival sources in Mexico provided the evidence. But childhood experience had taught her the character of sheep, tacit knowledge that informed her analysis. *A Plague of Sheep* won the Herbert E. Bolton Prize as the best book published in Latin American History that year. It subsequently appeared in paperback, has been translated into Spanish, and remains an

influential example of the way in which environmental historians have revised traditional accounts of colonization.

Elinor's acute mind and enthusiastic personality gave her an unusual gift of synthesis, bringing together ideas and people. Since 1994 her many papers, her freely circulated course syllabi, and her opening of her own work to collegial critique engaged Latin American and North American approaches, mind sets, and colleagues. Whether among speakers of Spanish or English, Elinor was at home and made people at home.

Two large projects occupied Elinor in recent years: an ambitious environmental history of Latin America and a chapter on land use changes, environmental transformations and long distance trade for volume 4 of the *Cambridge Economic History of Latin America*. Elinor lived to see the final published form of this essay, which appears with a 2006 date. Her much anticipated synthesis of Latin American environmental history, which she struggled through her illness to complete, will be seen through the University of New Mexico Press by her friends in the field.

Throughout her battle with cancer Elinor remained resolutely cheerful, a gracious host to her many friends and neighbors in Toronto and Mexico and a determined teacher to the end. In the last week of her life she appeared on national television bravely explaining what people who are dying need the most. Supported by a circle of care givers and friends, Elinor eventually succumbed. Though she left no living relatives she will be remembered as one of the pioneers of environmental history. Through her posthumous publications we will be reminded again of our loss.

Richard Hoffmann, Viv Nelles

ASEH Annual Meeting Announcement and Call for Papers

Living on the Edge: Human Desires and Environmental Realities

Baton Rouge, LA, 28 FEBRUARY-3 MARCH, 2007
DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION: 1 JULY 2006

The program committee for the American Society for Environmental History invites panel, paper, and poster proposals for its March 2007 meeting in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Proposals may address any area of environmental history, but in keeping with the conference's theme, the committee specifically solicits submissions examining perceptions of risk and social responses to environmental disasters and the idea of living on the edge: edges of danger, edges of continents, edges of poverty, and the space between history and other disciplines. After the enormous destruction along the Gulf Coast resulting from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, it seems all the more essential to consider the deep complexities of dealing with environmental hazards, and the varying roles of science, government, politics, and community.

The committee supports approaches ranging from the transnational to the personal, from policy to politics, and we encourage proposals by anthropologists, ecologists, economists, geographers, and sociologists. Panels that integrate disparate geographic areas or disciplinary approaches will be particularly favored. By seeking interdisciplinary conversations about environmental disasters and their implications, we hope to cast new light on this subject. However,

the committee *strongly* recommends proposals for complete panels. Individual papers are welcome, but they are more difficult to accommodate. To maximize the number of papers yet maintain opportunities for creative exchanges among panelists and the audience, the committee also requests that panel proposals be limited either to three papers and a discussant or four papers and no comment. Participants are limited to presenting only one formal paper, but they may also engage in roundtable, chairing, or commenting duties.

To submit a proposal, go to <http://www.aseh.net>, click on the link for the Baton Rouge 2007 conference, and type or paste in the standard information.

Should you have questions, please contact any member of the program committee:

David Louter, Chair, National Park Service
(David_Louter@nps.gov)

Betsy Mendelsohn, University of Maryland
(bmendel@umd.edu)

Craig Colten, Louisiana State University
(ccolten@lsu.edu)

Laura Watt, EDAW Inc.
(lawatt@california.com)

Call for Proposals to Host Future ASEH Conferences

The Site Selection Committee is now soliciting proposals from individuals or groups who are interested in hosting the Annual Meeting of the American Society for Environmental History in 2009 (and possibly 2010). Those interested should contact the Chair of the Site Selection Committee, Paul S. Sutter (Department of History, LeConte

Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602-1602; 706-542-2497; sutter@uga.edu) for a copy of the ASEH's Conference Guidelines and other information. The deadline for submission of proposals for the 2009 meeting is *October 15, 2006*. Please keep in mind that hosting a conference requires substantial effort and time as well as significant institutional support.

Announcements

Member News

The University of Nevada – Las Vegas recently honored **Hal Rothman** with a distinguished professorship and a presidential medal. The UNLV Environmental Studies Program presented Hal with a founders award, and he also received a Livable Communities award from the Nevada chapter of the Architectural Institute of America.

Jan Oosthoek was awarded a Faculty Teaching Fellowship from the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne for the coming semester, 2006. He will develop a handbook for teaching science in a humanities context, with a special interest in environmental history. He will take up a lectureship (assistant professorship) for the duration of the award.

Books

Dianne Glave's and **Mark Stoll's** edited collection, *To Love the Wind and the Rain: African Americans and Environmental History*, was recently published with the University of Pittsburgh Press.

Scribe Publications in Melbourne just brought out **Steve Pyne's** new book, *The Still-Burning Bush*. This study grew out of a month-long fellowship to Australian National University in May 2005.

Sylvia Hood Washington, Heather Goodall, and Paul Rosier have edited a book, *Echoes from the Poisoned Well: Global Memories of Environmental Injustice*. This is an historical examination of environmental justice struggles across the globe from the perspective of environmentally marginalized communities. It is unique in environmental justice historiography because it recounts these struggles by integrating the actual voices and memories of communities who grappled with environmental inequalities. (Lexington Books, March 2006, 458 pages, ISBN 0-7391-1432-8, \$29.95 paper)

Christof Mauch, Douglas Weiner, and Nathan Stoltzfus have edited a book, *Shades of Green: Environment Activism Around the Globe*. This book examines the impact of political, economic, religious, and scientific institutions on environmental activism around the world. Discussing issues unique to different parts of the world, *Shades of Green* shows that environmentalism around the globe has been strengthened, weakened, or suppressed by a variety of local, national, and international concerns, politics, and social realities. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers)

Conferences (Non-ASEH)

Environmental Summit Held at UC Santa Barbara

By Michael A. Osborne and Jennifer O. Thatcher, University of California, Santa Barbara

ASEH sent two representatives to the Summit, held February 23-25, 2006 at UC Santa Barbara. Some 110 people, by invitation only, drawn mainly from academe and mainly from North America, attended (others came from Iceland, Europe, and Japan).

Summit goals included the following:

To take stock of teaching and research in Environmental Studies

To think about where the field ought to be headed in the future

To encourage greater communication across the many disciplines – physical, biological, and social sciences, and the humanities – that deal with “environmental” problems and solutions

To decide collectively about whether to establish a new professional association focusing on university- and graduate-level environmental education and research

The first plenary session included surveys of North American environmental studies programs and sparked much talk about interdisciplinary collaboration and education. One university dean of an environmental education unit spoke about how academic problems tended to be disciplinary, while practical problems were most often interdisciplinary. Others described environmental studies as “meta-disciplinary,” or stressed “systems thinking” applied to individual environmental themes such as watersheds, or, especially sustainability. David Orr, Kai Lee, and others gave their rather well known views on environmental education. Among the most articulate of plenary speakers was Deborah Calahan, former President of the League of Conservation Voters, who enlightened us on the extent of environmental *illiteracy* and the dynamics of national and regional advocacy communities. Here I think, was a rather rare opening in the summit for valuation of what some environmental historians of the modern era do – viz. policy and history, political history of environmental issues, environmental issues and the law, history of environmental activism and environmental groups, religion and the environment, how governments work, etc.

A smaller session we attended had representatives from several environmental studies-related organizations. Mike presented the history and goals of ASEH. Here, as throughout the conference, there was a group of people concerned mainly with the quality of undergraduate interdisciplinary environmental education. Other sessions had much useful information on “how we did it here” and what were deemed to be “quality” environmental studies programs and departments.

The meeting closed with the possibility of another “national” meeting, and perhaps a rather fluid steering committee to see what might be done in the future. There was quite a lot of support for a new organization as well as comparisons with the short-lived Northeast Environmental Studies Group of the 1980s.

The URL with the program, PowerPoint presentations, and other conference information is available at <http://www.es.ucsb.edu/essummit/>

The website also has short biographies of attendees and many photographs. Additionally, future plans for what might come next may be had by contacting William R. Freudenburg at wfreudenburg@es.ucsb.edu

from **Announcements** page 6

Hurricane Katrina Session at the AHA Meeting

By Martin Reuss, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

At the urging of James J. Sheehan, the President of the American Historical Association, the Program Committee of the 2006 meeting organized a special session on "What is Lost, What Comes Next? Historians Consider Katrina." Its eleventh hour birth meant that the session did not make it into the program book, and it was somewhat awkwardly inserted into a lunchtime slot on Saturday. Nevertheless, the session drew a crowd of about fifty people and stimulated a lively discussion.

Participants in the session were Lawrence Powell (moderator), of Tulane University; Arnold Hirsch, an urban historian from the University of New Orleans; Craig Wilder, an urban historian from Dartmouth College and community activist; Imani Perry, a Ph.D. and J.D., who is on the faculty of Rutgers University Law School; and Martin Reuss, senior water resources historian in the headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Rather than presenting formal papers, each panelist talked for about 5-10 minutes about Hurricane Katrina. Most attention was given to social issues, especially the fate of the black population of New Orleans. Reuss discussed issues dealing with risk and governmental coordination, stressing that, despite the magnitude of the disaster, few problems dealing with hurricane protection or proposals for recovery are new.

Among both the urban historians on the panel and discussants in the audience pervasive pessimism reigned regarding the future of New Orleans. The most that could be imagined was a small city with less of a black population. Many doubted that the city could ever regain its popularity as a tourist mecca. This profoundly depressing assessment should stimulate the environmental history community to examine more closely the reasons why cities such as New Orleans fall victim to disasters that are not natural and may be avoidable.

Call for Papers and Posters – Fourth ESEH Conference



The European Society for Environmental History invites proposals for panels and posters for its upcoming 4th conference in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 5-9 June 2007.

Submission of abstracts started 6 February 2006. Deadline is *1 June 2006*. You can submit your abstract on-line through the conference website.

Click here to access the conference pages:
<<http://www.let.vu.nl/conference/eseh/index.html>>

New Websites

ASEH will launch its new website in late May. In addition to providing information on our next conference in Baton Rouge, it will include online polling and voting. The address will remain <www.aseh.net>. We are very grateful to Jan Oosthoek, who has served as webmaster for several years. Liza Piper at the University of British Columbia will take over as webmaster in late May.

The University of Michigan-Dearborn's Science and Technology Studies Program, in collaboration with The Henry Ford, is pleased to announce the launching of a new website and online archive, The Automobile in American Life and Society, at <www.autolife.umd.umich.edu>. Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the DaimlerChrysler Corporation Fund, the site contains an overview essay and case study on the automobile's relationship to the environment authored by Martin Melosi, as well as similar sections on labor, gender, race, and design authored by Stephen Meyer, Margaret Walsh, Virginia Scharff, Thomas Sugrue, and David Gartman. Each essay is copiously illustrated with archival materials, most from the extensive collections of The Henry Ford, and supplemented with a variety of materials for teachers and students (annotated bibliography, definitions, reading comprehension and discussion questions, writing and research assignments). Also included are more than a dozen oral histories of major automobile designers taken during the 1980s by The Henry Ford, digitized and made available online for the first time.

from **President's Desk** page 2

have some kind of problem?" Him? I shrugged. He's like a stray dog, been following me around. As long as I had Andy, I might as well have had a sign that said, This is the guy. Abduct this one.

The tour ended the next morning with Andy flagging a taxi, thrusting his badge in the cabbie's face, and keeping a sweeping glare for bad guys while the cabbie drove like he was carrying nitroglycerin. When I went to pay, Andy shoved his badge again in the cabbie's face and waved me off with a smile.

So I never saw much of Athens, but I had a grand time in Crete, lecturing at Chania and visiting the ruins at Knossos and watching goats trample through freshly burned garrigue. And I got some terrific material on fire ecology. Sources are where you find them. They are not all in the library. Or on the Web. Sometimes they come with badges.

Steve Pyne
ASEH President

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- Introducing a New Column: The Profession
- Special Insert: What's Next for African American Environmental History?

ASEH News 

American Society for Environmental History

c/o Historical Research Associates, Inc.
119 Pine Street, Suite 301
Seattle, WA 98101-1592

What's Next for African American Environmental History?

Part I

Compiled and Edited by Dianne D. Glave, Center for Bioenvironmental Research, Tulane University

Fish full of mercury
Oh, mercy mercy me
Oh, things ain't what they used to be
No, no
Radiation in the ground and in the sky
Animals and birds who live nearby are dying
Oh, mercy mercy me
Oh, things ain't what they used to be
What about this overcrowded land?
How much more abuse from man can you stand?
Marvin Gaye, "Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)," 1971

" 'Why are we in the [expletive] woods?' he asked. 'That's enough nature for me, man. People don't belong in the [expletive] mountains. Get a [expletive] postcard.' "

DMX on a trip to Yellowstone Park on MTV, "The 'This Wasn't in the Brochure' Award," "Reality TV Hall of Fame," *Blender: The Ultimate Guide to Music and More*, April 2006, 54

Andrew Hurley, Mart A. Stewart, Nicholas Proctor, and Sylvia Hood Washington have developed a niche in environmental history focusing in part on African Americans and the environment. "*To Love the Wind and the Rain": African Americans and Environmental History* (2006) expands on their scholarship exploring three strands—rural, urban/suburban, and environmental justice—in one volume. Melvin Dixon and Toni Morrison speak of nature in the literary tradition, perspectives from another discipline. Through activism, Frank and Audrey Peterman, Jerome Ringo, and Wangari Maathai are redefining environmental activism serving the people of the African Diaspora. The competing voices of musical artists Marvin Gaye and DMX indicate the complexity of perceptions—whether in environmental history, other disciplines, or activism—in the African Diaspora.

With this emerging literature and historiography, I ask: "What's Next for African American Environmental History?" inspired by one of Adam Rome's last volumes as editor of *Environmental History* titled "What's Next for Environmental History?" (vol. 10, no. 1, January 2005). Rome drew upon many disciplines and global perspectives for that special issue. Along similar lines, I invited several experts ranging from scholars to community activists to submit short pieces exploring African Americans and the environment from interdisciplinary perspectives to global interpretations.

Dianne D. Glave, Center for Bioenvironmental Research, Tulane University

A series of questions and responses follows.

What is African American environmental history?

African American environmental history is concerned with questions of environmental justice in the past; patterns of exploitation within society that have limited African American access to nature and the fruit of community engagement with the environment; African American resistance to that exploitation and mobilization to confront environmental injustice; ways that African Americans have acted on the environment and have been affected by it in everyday life; the historical environmental health exposures and risks to African American communities; the role African Americans have played in the expansion of human influence over the natural world; and the role that African Americans have played in helping to build sustainable societies. How have the benefits and burdens of the shaping of the built environment, and human interaction with a finite natural environment in North America been distributed between African Americans and the larger human community during different periods since 1492? In this context, African Americans are understood to be individuals, families, and communities of African descent, and the larger human community that includes European Americans, Native Americans, and other communities of color. Thus, African American environmental history acknowledges that the human community is not uniform, that conflicts over access, consumption, technological development, use and waste of environmental resources have historically existed between different segments of society depending upon race, class, and gender. African American environmental history attempts to understand the historical character and ecological contexts of these conflicts, and the ways they have been shaped by racism. The field is concerned with the ways in which such conflicts have impacted African American communities, and helped to shape the environment of the larger society.

African American environmental history also traces ways that African Americans have observed, thought about, and conceived of the environment as evidenced in narratives, music, oral history, writing, and other forms of creative expression. As African Americans and their ancestors in the Diaspora underwent ordeals of uprooting from the land, the Middle Passage, maritime experience, plantation slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction, peonage of sharecropping, forced and voluntary migrations to rural areas, cities and suburbs, they have adapted older values and established new ones related to their natural and human environment, developed new interest in observing and studying the environment, and made more deliberate environmental choices in their personal lives, advocacy, and public policy. African American environmental history involves a range of African American transformations in awareness of individual selves as bodies, families, community institutions, work places, and the spaces of civic engagement. African American environmental history also explores the ways that established environmental ideologies have been shaped by issues of

race, and historical changes in the consciousness and scientific, legal, educational, and political institutions of the larger society to address these issues.

Carl Anthony, Community and Resource Unit, The Ford Foundation

African American environmental history—the very phrase bespeaks its fusion of historical fields. Neither a natural phenomenon nor a place defines this sub-specialty of environmental history, but instead, for the first time of which I am aware, a single social group, African Americans. Its arrival marks a milestone in the project of melding social and environmental history that has gathered steam over the last decade and a half. The move leaps past the problem identified some years back by Alan Taylor, of environmental history's inclination to view societies as wholes rather than in parts, downplaying their internal tensions and conflicts. Now, arguably the other of the two most aggrieved group experiences in American history, along with Native Americans, has fallen under the field's spotlight, and the social historian's commitment to uncovering African Americans' historical agency become yoked to the environmental history project. Singling out African Americans' environmental experiences, these historians have reinforced other trends in the field, among them, the turn to cities and industrial areas, long the exclusive reserve of the social historians. We have also learned more about how religion can figure into a group's nature relations, and more in line with the field's naturalist inclinations, about how environmental history methods may apply to the American South, a region central to the nation's agricultural history, but long a side-show to our field's obsession with the American West. Contributions thus far have staked out a solid sub-field, with much further work to be done.

This new sub-field also promises to make wider ripples across the fields whose agendas it fuses. For African American historians and social historians more generally, it points up how a history focused only on group activities and institutions, too exclusively "social," may miss important dimensions of agency itself. Even in the most extreme instance of social control, slavery, when African Americans' very bodies and lives belonged to others, the lands they gardened, the woods to which they escaped, provided arenas and means for living by and for themselves. For environmental historians, African American environmental history has begun to unpack shadows and margins that yield insights into how environmental history as a whole has evolved thus far. They point up a "whiteness" long noticeable on the faces at ASEH meetings; they suggest how; in silent and unconscious ways, this whiteness has also steered our scholarly agenda. It shows up not just in our characteristic regional emphases but in our topical choice, particularly, I would suggest, in the ways we handle human bodily difference. Environmental historians have had their racial other, the Native American, but even there, it is remarkable how externally focused and behavioral our most brilliant, "classic" histories of Native American-white relations have been. They are not the place to go to find out about the racial thinking of the time. Once you start engaging African American's environmental history, however, and not just what whites thought of African Americans but what they thought of themselves and their environments, many of us have found the fraught history of American racism more unavoidable.

Chris Sellers, Department of History, Stony Brook University

How have the experiences of African Americans been distinctive in environmental history?

African American interaction with the American environment has been exceptional in several regards. First, African origins make the black experience with nature unique. Slaves may have come to the Americas in shackles but they brought with them baggage that mediated their relationship with "new world" ecosystems. They carried with them unique knowledge of animal husbandry and plant cultivation, in particular, rice, distinctive religious views that sometimes gave nature agency, and traditional practices regarding food, medicine, hunting, building, and burial of the dead. They also brought resistance to a number of diseases, in particular yellow fever and falciparum malaria.

Second, as Mart Stewart notes, the experience of slavery makes the African American encounter with the environment distinctive. Planters claimed possession of slaves' bodies, in terms of production and reproduction, and used slaves to do their bidding on the southern landscape. While the slave system was never total and slaves found room to exercise some control over their bodies and their environments, the system affected profoundly African American health and limited substantially the ways in which this community could interact with the landscape. Third, segregation and continued racism during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries made the African American environmental experience unique. The failure of the federal government to deliver reparations, the development of the tenant farming system, and the emergence of new racial restrictions impeded southern black land ownership and helped precipitate migration westward and northward. In cities throughout the United States, racial exclusion barred African Americans from many public parks and made it impossible for middle-class African Americans to join European Americans in their flight from urban environmental hazards to suburbs. Fourth, this distinctive African American experience with the environment forged a unique African American environmental politics, one that has insisted that race, land, and health issues are interlocked. This politics can be seen when slaves subtly or not so subtly resisted the plantation mode of production, when Civil Rights activists demanded equal access to parks or suburban communities, when Black Power advocates nostalgically evoked the landscape of Africa as an escape from white domination, or when African Americans struggled to protect their communities from disproportionate exposure to nature's hazards.

There are, of course, important similarities that can be drawn between the African American experience with nature and that of other groups in the United States, especially minority communities. There are also important differences within the African American community. Region, gender, class, religion, and other factors mediated African Americans' relationships with nature. That said, the African American case is broadly exceptional and warrants much more attention from environmental historians.

Colin Fisher, History Department, University of San Diego

African American environmental history should explore how black Americans' distinctive social, political and economic circumstances have affected their interaction with the land. Fortunately, we needn't start from scratch; black writers, from the abolitionists through the Harlem Renaissance writers to contemporary theorists, have examined in some depth the effect of

slavery, peonage and racial inequality on stewardship and on black Americans' sense of place. This literature offers a fairly well-developed body of environmental theory, including a number of claims that call for further empirical investigation. For example, critics of slavery such as Frederick Douglass, Henry Bibb and Lewis Clarke claimed that slavery undermined incentives to stewardship. Were slaves good stewards of the land? How exactly did their productive activities hunting and gathering, farming, and working in craft and industrial occupations relate them to the material world? Did they find incentives to stewardship, and if so, where? More generally, how have the oppressive conditions of black labor affected how they manage their physical environment?

Second, many critics of racial oppression have argued that it has distorted black Americans' ability to give meaning to their physical environment, and thus alienated them from the American landscape. But is that claim too pessimistic about black Americans' capacity for creative agency? Counter-themes in black thought suggest ways that black Americans have used their connection to the natural world—connections forged through their labor, their art and their collective memory—as the basis of their sense of self in a culture of racial oppression. Scholarship in this area should further investigate how such resistance to oppression, or simply the conduct of ordinary life in the interstices of an unjust social structure, could create a bond to the land. In general, we should explore blacks' strategies for giving meaning to the world and for establishing an enduring sense of place and sense of self—for making homes in the shadow of oppression. How did such strategies evolve? What kind of bonds did they create and what kinds of meanings were given to the land? Further, how were those meanings (and the land itself) passed on from one generation to the next? That is, how did one generation put the land in the next generation's keeping? Such questions, I think, direct our attention toward what is distinctive about African American environmental history and, beyond that, toward the relationship between social injustice and environmental stewardship generally.

Kimberly Smith, Political Science Department, Carleton College

What are the benefits of looking to other disciplines and exploring interdisciplinary perspectives in developing methodology and more?

Enslavement, segregation, and persistent institutional and individual racism leave African-Americans in precarious positions in relationship to mainstream historical narratives. These factors also suggest African-American environmental history would benefit from interdisciplinary perspectives and methodology, which enhance traditional historiography. In addition, a holistic appreciation of any environmental history is dependent on sources that come from various modes of perception, including the written word. Here, the disciplinary tools of literary study are in order. For instance, Daniel Philippon, in *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement* (2004), makes the argument that a distinct tradition of individual-authored writing by several European-Americans was key in the formation of metaphors which helped Americans understand "nature" and sparked the development of environmental groups, some still in existence. Identifying the influence of writing on the public sphere, this study gives a clear example of the role of literature in environmental movements, however, a turn to the study of African-Americans necessitates a wider scope of environmental thought and action. Prohibitions against the enslaved population's

acquisition of reading and writing skills and African cultural traditions often favoring orality, musicality, and performance are important to acknowledge when locating the sites of African-American environmental culture and consciousness, both past and present. African-American environmental history will simply not be rigorous enough if it is driven by a restrictive notion that the self-authored document, including monographs, journals/diaries, and newspaper articles, constitutes the best evidence in researching a group's history. Since, perhaps, no group's history is bound by the written word, looking to disciplines that privilege modes of engagement other than the written word promise to yield the benefit of history with greater depth and cultural sensitivity.

At the same time, another facet of the rich present of African-American environmental history is its influence on "neo-slave" poetry, one genre of contemporary literature, which takes up the issue of slavery in the United States. Frank X. Walker's *Buffalo Dance: The Journey of York*—the enslaved body servant of William Clark of the Corps of Discovery (2004); Marilyn Nelson's *Carver: a Life in Poems*—about the life of botanist and agricultural scientist George Washington Carver (2001); and Quraysh Ali Lansana's *They Shall Run: Harriet Tubman Poems*—reflections on the Underground Railroad conductor and other fugitive slaves (2004) all transform history into literature which helps us rethink what was American environmental experience through the lives of people who suffered enslavement and who came from multicultural traditions. Indeed, these poets show that research can energize artistic approaches to the "re-writing" of history itself. Scholars can benefit from interdisciplinary tools that pinpoint the myriad ways African-Americans have been thinking about, responding to, and shaping environmental issues. African-American environmental history's future is bright.

Kimberly N. Ruffin, English Department, Bates College

What can African Diaspora history and studies contribute to further developing African American environmental history?

African Diaspora studies and history offer a wide array of starting points for in-depth studies in African American environmental history. Following the leadership of such figures as W. E. B. DuBois, founder of cultural Pan-Africanism and anthropologist, Melville Herskovits, whose research in Africa and the Americas described complex interconnections between "old" world and "new," Diaspora scholarship aims to situate the lives and works of African descendants in networks of shared experience, while at the same time respecting the diversity and specificity of these experiences across at least five centuries of population movement and several continents. Although the literature on the Diaspora is large, little of it so far has been cast in environmental terms or generated in answer to environmentally framed questions. Thus, although we may read much about Diaspora communities, their religions, economies, foodways, and customs, the ways in which African descendants have managed the new landscapes, climates, and natural resource bases into which moved, usually initially by force, has received much less attention. For example, the history of *marronage*—self-liberation of the enslaved who often established free communities—could be told at least partly in terms of the potentials of various environments for running, hiding, and finding sustenance. Not surprisingly, rugged conditions offered the best protection, with the rain forest quilombos of Brazil, the maroon townships of Jamaica's Blue Mountains, and the malarial murk of Virginia's Great Dismal Swamp supporting Maroons for

generations. Further, few transatlantic studies can tell us what kinds of environmental knowledge Diasporans may have brought with them from varied African locales.

One well documented exception to this trend shows the huge impact Diasporan labor has had on a single region in what is now the United States. In the eighteenth century, led by Senegambians who were chosen for their expertise in rice cultivation, Africans and their descendants created the vast plantation landscape of low country South Carolina and Georgia, designing as well as constructing the vast interlocking systems of dikes and canals that irrigated the crop. Further research may reveal other, equally large scale environmental signatures, but smaller scale studies would also have great value. Thus, researchers seeking projects might also follow the dust tracks of the Harlem Renaissance novelist, folklorist, and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston through the South's turpentine camps where teams of African American men and women help shape the region's pine forest; trace the paths of healers and root workers she and others have studied through woodlands and wetlands; or probe the legacies of coal miners, watermen, and agriculturalists whose specialized Diasporan knowledge has yet to be thoroughly investigated. Although African influences in religion, ritual, burial landscapes and residence patterns have been described, as yet little is known about how Diasporan values and cosmologies inform living spaces and sacred terrain. One promising strategy pays attention to lands set aside as sacred forests, "constructed" landscapes in West and Central Africa and the Diaspora that embody the healing potentials of wilderness within a designated space. Another attends carefully to language, stories, tales, and recollections which encode concepts and terms through which African descendants have made sense aspects of the environment. Some, like the term *Feenda* for wilderness forest used by West-Central Africans in South Carolina and Georgia have African antecedents, as Ras Michael Brown has shown. Others, like the deceptively plain English phrase "old field" reflect the African and Diasporan principle that humans have an obligation to maintain the wellbeing of cleared land. Pointedly used by African American farmers to critique whites who neglected land during Reconstruction, terms like this suggest local phrasings of Diasporic standards of environmental accountability that warrant further study. Such standards also raise questions about how values concerning the environment find voice in urban settings. How, for example, do they inform African Americans' responses to such massive state-sponsored disruptions as so-called "urban renewal," the purposeful siting of expressways in African American neighborhoods, and the use of eminent domain as an instrument of environmental change, to name only a few?

These are but a few themes of many that could be explored. Clearly, environmental historians have an important role to play in future Diaspora research.

Grey Gundaker, American Studies Program and Department of Anthropology, College of William and Mary

The multiple geographic and ethnic streams of the "modern African Diaspora"—which begins roughly in the fifteenth century with the start of the transatlantic trade in African captives to the New 'Atlantic' World by European nations, and extends beyond the conclusion of the trade on to present day—is a study with clearly identifiable threads that lead into an exploration of the African American in American environmental history. Stressing that Africans did not come to America as "blank sheets" experiencing a

sudden amnesia of the world they left behind, scholars of the most commonly studied and present period of the history of the African Diaspora enable environmental historians to detail the inextricable connection among the agricultural, industrial and technological development of the Americas and the steady arrival of African peoples. Furthermore, knowledge of the cultural and ideological history of African peoples—the "Weltanschauung" or worldview that each African ethnicity brought to the Americas, makes clearer for the environmental historian the description, presentation, and justification of the built worlds and reconfigured natural landscapes that Africans created singly for themselves and with and for whites once they arrived on American shores. As with the study of the African Diaspora, African-American environmental history should be approached from the standpoint of African descendants as both primary subjects and principal speakers. For it is from their voices—e.g. narratives, recollections, and oral histories—the descendants of African diasporans, that we can learn and see how they used and appreciated environmental space; how they created strategies of economy; how they turned cultivation habits into medicinal practices; and how they established settlement patterns which respected the individual's role in the community. As scholars, our examination of their choices will extend back to ancestral villages, and show how re-memory (i.e. Toni Morrison's notion of recurrent, traumatic memories of chattel slavery) has informed the African descendants' ability to accommodate the changes of time, space, and place.

To be sure, African-American environmental history is not dissociated from the study of the African Diaspora. The African Diaspora is as much about roots, roads, streams, ocean cliffs, gardens, plantations, burial mounds, homelands, swamps, perennials, and transplants as the study of African-American environmental history is about land ownership and reparations, beatification projects, reclamation of space, eminent domain, and responses to natural disaster relief. As noted, not only do these areas of academic endeavor share common themes, but also they borrow from a common discourse and vocabulary that fundamentally register discussion about—again, the when and the where. Today, dispersed descendants of African diasporans are immigrating to America—from and into other predominately African diasporic communities—where they are creating "trans-geographical" or multi-national cities as and of "intra-diasporic immigrants," who continue to move in and out of diasporic communities within the United States. African-American environmental history along with African Diaspora Studies now must begin to think in terms of diasporic hyper-mobility or frequent mobility across the globe and African-Americans' residential preferences; and of de-territorialization—uprootedness, dispossession, forced removal—and urban renewal; and of national exclusionary policies and gated communities. Having said this, scholars, like those who have contributed to this series of essays, who bridge both African-American environmental history—a sub-discipline and African Diaspora Studies—a discipline, recognize, quite simply, that both share, fundamentally, attention to "locality," the symbolic and the actual as well as the sacred and the secular. More emphatically, they share attention to the where, when, and how people of African descent establish and nurture a sense of home, a sanctuary, for themselves.

Angela M. Leonard, Department of History, Loyola College in Maryland (Baltimore)

Note: Part 2 of 2 concludes with the Summer 2006 newsletter.