

## ASEH Launches New Website

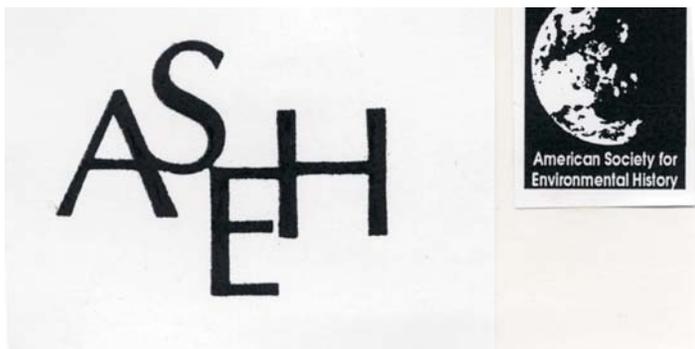
ASEH has launched a new website that includes online polling, joining and renewal of membership, submission of conference session proposals, and a directory of members and experts. In December 2006 we will also vote online – watch for voting instructions in *ASEH News* (fall and winter issues), and on the website. The Home Page provides a link to the directory of members and experts, as does the Membership page. Only members can enter their information (you'll need to register on the website first), but the search function is available to everyone, including journalists (see the Home Page and Membership). We have also added information on the history of ASEH and on past conferences and events, and we have plans to expand the "Resources" section with course outlines, articles, and other materials.

Here is the URL: [www.aseh.net](http://www.aseh.net)

Once again we thank Jan Oosthoek and Dennis Williams for all their wonderful work on our former website, and we welcome Liza Piper, University of British Columbia, as our new webmaster. If you have questions or comments, please contact [webmaster@aseh.net](mailto:webmaster@aseh.net) or [director@aseh.net](mailto:director@aseh.net).

ASEH Website Committee:

- Lisa Mighetto, Chair
- Jan Oosthoek, Former Webmaster
- Liza Piper, New Webmaster
- Melissa Wiedenfeld, H-Environment Representative



These logos from the 1970s and 1990s appear in the "History of ASEH" section of new website.

## ASEH Experts' Roster: Members Can Sign Up Now A Note from the Outreach Committee

By Ravi Rajan, University of California – Santa Cruz

As you may be aware, the ASEH Outreach Committee decided, among other things, to create an experts' roster to enable the media, other professional communities, and organizations to tap into the considerable expertise in the arsenal of the American Society for Environmental History. This decision was one of a slate of recommendations made at the last annual meeting. (For the Outreach Committee's report for 2006, please see <http://www.aseh.net/committees/outreach-committee-report>.)

We are glad to inform you that the online form to create such a Roster is now up and running. The form (<http://www.aseh.net/createMember>) is simplicity itself, and will barely take you a few minutes to complete. We urge you to please set aside a small amount of time to enter your information, so that your research attains the exposure that it deserves.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact [nelangst@wisc.edu](mailto:nelangst@wisc.edu) or [srrajan@gmail.com](mailto:srrajan@gmail.com).

ASEH Outreach Committee:

- Nancy Langston, Chair
- Karl Brooks
- Catherine Christen
- Dale Goble
- Gregg Mitman
- Ravi Rajan

## Awards Submissions for 2006 – Second Notice

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 [director@aseh.net](mailto:director@aseh.net).

For a list of previous award winners and evaluation comments, see ASEH's new website [www.aseh.net](http://www.aseh.net) and click on "Awards."

## From the President's Desk

### The Book (continued) – See *ASEH News*, Winter 2005

Depending who you ask, the numbers of new books published annually exceed 175,000, this without counting self-published works (to which I've contributed). If we begin serious book blogging, we'll soon have a world in which everyone is writing and no one reading. The good news is that interest in nonfiction books is soaring.

The *NYT Book Review* recently quoted Cullen Murphy, retiring editor of *Atlantic*, on the reasons. "In recent years," he wrote, "we have found that a certain kind of reporting – long-form narrative reporting – has proved to be of enormous value...in making sense of a complicated and fractious world." Certain literary traits that used to belong "with particular force" to fiction, "like a strong sense of plot and memorable characters in the service of important and morally charged subject matter," are now "more reliably" found in narrative nonfiction than in literary fiction. This sounds like a trend that ought to tack pretty closely to environmental history. To character and plot we can add setting as an active agent. It's enough to make an author's mouth water.

Thus when the Creative Writing Program at ASU asked if I would like to offer a course in nonfiction, I instantly agreed. I decided to call the project "literary nonfiction," to distinguish it from the navel-gazing that has so distorted "creative nonfiction." I wished to avoid the taint from scandals that always seem to cluster around

memoir and recovered (or too-often, invented) memory; these from fiction authors writing to the strongest genre, which today is nonfiction. (The scholarly community has its own distinctive pathology – plagiarism.) The course begins with the distinction between the craft of writing and the art of writing. My definitions go like this. The "art of writing" is the act of matching substance with style. The "craft of writing" is the business of matching the prose to the chosen design, or genre.

Mostly, the art of writing is not something that historians, in particular, give much thought to. We take off-the-shelf formulas or adopt the house styles of target publications. Most historical writings today, moreover, emulate the publication styles of the sciences, except that, in place of hypothesis and data, they advance thesis and evidence. The prevailing formulas are means to convey this material as succinctly as possible. The common use of such expressions as "the historian" or "a historian" (as in, "It is the concern of the historian to...") only reinforces the sense that the design is a generic formula, not unique to the writing at hand. The point is to have one's work slide into suitable slots in the master historiography and one's data fit into the collectivity of evidence. As against *Star-Trek's* Borg, resistance appears futile.

But not wholly. Just as with software templates, the genres and formulas can be tweaked. Every part is amenable to change, and the question of matching style to subject has always seemed to me the most creative element of scholarship. It's a skill that can be taught and learned no less than hitting and fielding, although, as with baseball, not everyone will show the same aptitude. Usually, when we imagine literary history, we think of grand narrative (and too often, wars) because that is where, most readily, character and plot converge amid conflict and morally charged themes. But every piece of writing can benefit from a more conscious scrutiny of art and craft.

The issue should matter for environmental historians especially. An understanding of literary dynamics might help us animate nature as more than a static setting. We can show, not simply tell. We can render imagined worlds – wholly factual, with nothing invented and nothing vital omitted – that evoke instead of declaim. At a minimum, we must confront those most basic choices embedded in every historical text: where to begin, where to end, and how connect those two sites with some kind of textual arc. That framing cannot be separated from all the other choices, such as voice, since the positioning of the end points will decide, for example, whether the story is ironic.

There is an ample case for scholarship as scholarship, for writing to each other as serious practitioners working common veins of evidence, exchanging data, and (shudder) "discouraging." The formulas and genres exist because, over centuries, they represent evolved and tested means of expression, which one ignores at peril; most mutations, after all, prove sterile or are lethal to the mutant. But if we wish also to reach a wider audience, or to introduce truly innovative ideas, or to grant environmental history standing as an imagined world, then we will have to devise literary means to do so. The issue goes beyond good writing, as commonly understood, or rewriting a dissertation into publishable form, both of which are matters of craft. It gets to the art of history.

Steve Pyne  
ASEH President

### American Society for Environmental History

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Melissa Wiedenfeld, *Dalton State College*

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](http://www.aseh.net)>. Contact <[webmaster@aseh.net](mailto:webmaster@aseh.net)> to discuss including material on the web page.

Items for the next newsletter should be sent by *September 18, 2006*, to: Lisa Mighetto, Editor, 119 Pine St., Suite 301, Seattle, WA 98101. E-mail to <[mighetto@hrassoc.com](mailto:mighetto@hrassoc.com)>.

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## The Profession

### How to Prepare for an Academic Job Interview

By Paul Hirt, Arizona State University

This article is designed for those seeking their first academic job beyond graduate school. Although the job market is tight, it is nonetheless large and diverse. There are different types of interviews to go with different types of jobs. Interviews can be half-hour sessions at the AHA, one-hour phone interviews, or the coveted on-campus two-day marathon. Jobs can be part-time or full-time, temporary or tenure-track, teaching emphasis or research emphasis, entry level or advanced. While different jobs require different interview preparation strategies, there are some general principles that apply to most interviews.

Carefully examine every detail of the job announcement and prepare to respond to the specific elements in it. Departments seek to fill identified needs and you must show them that you meet those needs. This is extremely important. When you discuss your qualifications and interests, don't stray too far from the job description or they may question your commitment or appropriateness for the advertised position.

Find out as much as you can about the interview: how long will it last, who will participate, what questions will they ask, what do they want you to do. Get as much information as possible about any formal presentations they want you to make. Clarify whether they want a teaching or research presentation or both. Ask about the presentation venue: students or faculty or both? How many? Room size? Equipment? Be sure to tell them ahead of time if you have technology requirements for your presentations. Always be prepared to present without technology. If the projector bulb dies, it won't be your fault but it will nonetheless reflect poorly on you if you are flustered or stalled because the equipment failed.

Thoroughly research the department before your interview. Find out who is the chair and who is on the search committee. Review all the faculty profiles, especially their areas of expertise. Peruse some faculty publications, especially anyone who is on the search committee or who works in a similar field as you. Look carefully through the course catalog and degree programs. Look for courses that you think they might want you to teach based on information in the job announcement. See if anyone is currently teaching those classes. If not, consider working up syllabi for those classes so you can distribute them at an appropriate time during your interview. (This can be risky if you offer a syllabus for a course that someone else in the department is teaching.) Read about the department's areas of specialization, endowments, lecture series, special publications, etc., so you will be knowledgeable about the department when you arrive. All of this information is usually available on-line. If it isn't, contact the head of the search committee and ask them to send you any materials you don't have. Don't be worried about annoying them with these kinds of requests. Most likely they will be pleased by your interest and professionalism.

Practice your presentations ahead of time with a friendly audience, especially if this is only your first or second academic interview. Arrange a mock interview at your home institution with supportive graduate students and faculty. We do this at ASU as part of our "Preparing Future Faculty" program sponsored by the Council of Graduate Schools (see ). If you are lucky enough to be at an institution that has a PFF program, take advantage of it. If not, be proactive about asking for advice from friends, mentors, or your graduate student association.

Make your research presentations succinct and leave time for Q & A. Faculty members come to your presentation to get to know you and your work. An engaging conversation will accomplish this more effectively than a lecture. It is better to pique their interest and stimulate questions than to bore them with unnecessary details. My rule of thumb is to spend 60% your allotted time presenting and 40% responding. Make sure that you are also prepared to quickly summarize your "next" research project. Presumably you are done or nearly done with your dissertation, so the faculty will be wondering what new project you'll embark on next. If you haven't thought about that yet, get busy brainstorming because any institution that requires a research component in your job description will want to see that you have a long-term, coherent research strategy that will lead to continuing productive scholarship.

Teaching presentations are different than research presentations. The department will usually want you to deliver a full 50-minute lecture with all the bells and whistles that you would normally use in class. Sometimes the department will ask you to lecture on a specific topic and sometimes they will leave that choice up to you. Try to engage the students but be conservative. This is not the time to experiment or take risks. Avoid reading from notes. Ideally you should blend content with analysis and historiography. You may have both undergraduate students and faculty in the mock classroom, which can be awkward. Pitch your lecture to the students.

My last piece of advice is to get a good night's sleep. Social interaction is crucial and you should avoid being tired or unduly nervous. In the final analysis, the faculty observing your performance will be wondering whether you will be a dependable, cooperative, enjoyable colleague. When you get a job, you join a community. That community wants to know how you will contribute to their collective academic responsibilities as well as how you will influence the social dynamics of the department. Hopefully, it will be a good fit. If not, there's always another job interview. Good luck!

*Editor's Note:* This new column, which first appeared in the spring issue 2006, is intended for students and new professionals. Topics and authors change quarterly. Please send suggestions to <director@aseh.net>.

## ASEH Baton Rouge Conference Update

### 2007 Meeting to Include Rolling Seminar

By Craig Colten, Louisiana State University, Local Arrangements Chair

On Wednesday, February 28, 2007, ASEH will offer a “rolling seminar” in New Orleans. This event will take place on the day prior to ASEH’s annual conference and will give registrants a chance to view the impacts of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on New Orleans, while not missing any of the conference.

Three buses will roll out of Baton Rouge on Wednesday morning headed to three selected destinations in New Orleans. The buses will rotate through each stop where environmental historians will meet with local experts and participate in walking tours. Near the riverfront, Ari Kelman (UC Davis), author of *A City and Its River*, will lead a tour of the batture and portions of the French Quarter. Rich Campanella (Tulane), local resident and author of *Time and Place in New Orleans*, will introduce the seminar to the heavily devastated Lower 9th Ward. Ron Hagelman (Texas State), author of articles about risk and community on the delta and a flood evacuee, will lead a tour of the Lake Pontchartrain shore and the 17th Street Canal breach site. Other local community members and officials from the US Army Corps of Engineers will be stationed at the destinations as well.



On the bus ride from Baton Rouge, registrants will view the 60-minute BBC documentary about the Katrina landfall and its aftermath, “The Lost City of New Orleans.” The rolling seminar will be complemented by a track of special sessions during the conference. Conference sessions will begin on Thursday, March 1, 2007.

This is an exceptional opportunity to witness where New Orleans stands in its post-Katrina recovery. Please check the newsletter and the website for updates on registration for this rolling seminar; space is limited and we expect it to fill quickly.

#### Attention Presses and Authors

ASEH's conference in Baton Rouge will include a book exhibit. Please see the exhibit form provided on our website under “Conferences” at <[www.aseh.net](http://www.aseh.net)>. Deadline for submission is October 6, 2006. Also, you can contact Scholar's Choice at <[djpitts@scholarschoice.com](mailto:djpitts@scholarschoice.com)> or <[www.scholarschoice.com](http://www.scholarschoice.com)>.

### Film Review: “Blue Vinyl”

By Bruce Thompson, University of California – Santa Cruz

An informative, critical, yet entertaining film about the *vinyl industry*? Is such a thing possible? Like Michael Moore’s classic film about the automobile industry, *Roger and Me* (1989), Judith Helfand and Daniel B. Gold’s *Blue Vinyl* successfully marries the techniques of the investigative documentary and the personal essay.

Eschewing the impersonal detachment and voice-of-God narration of traditional documentaries, Moore memorably inserted his own hectoring but jovial persona into his film about the relationship between corporate greed and mass unemployment in Flint, Michigan. His pursuit of an interview with the CEO of General Motors gave *Roger and Me* the structure of a comic quest-narrative. Similarly, Helfand – whose previous film *A Healthy Baby Girl* examined the effects of toxic chemical exposure in the context of her own experience with DES-related cancer – offers a “toxic odyssey” of the vinyl industry in *Blue Vinyl*. Beginning with her parents’ decision to replace the red clapboard siding of their suburban Long Island home with blue vinyl, she investigates the environmental and biological risks posed by polyvinyl chloride (PVC), the chemical of which the new siding, like countless other industrial products, is composed.

From suburban Long Island the film moves to Lake Charles, Louisiana, “the vinyl capital of America,” where Mardi Gras celebrations occur against the backdrop of fire-belching chemical plants. At night, attorney Billy Baggett observes in one of the film’s most fascinating interviews, the dramatically lit skyline formed by those plants has the beauty of the Emerald City in MGM’s classic film *The Wizard of Oz*. But the film also informs us that most of the eighty-four victims of a fire at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas two decades ago died not from flames but from toxic fumes created by the burning of furniture and other products coated with PVCs. When it is burned (as well as when it is produced) vinyl produces copious quantities of dioxin, one of the most toxic and persistent pollutants in the modern industrial environment.

Baggett is the attorney for the families of workers in the industry who allege that PVC exposure has caused cancers of the larynx, lungs, and liver. Using conspiracy laws designed to fight organized crime, Baggett has unearthed industry documents that suggest that Louisiana’s chemical companies failed to inform their workers about the cancer risks associated with PVC exposure. An Italian scientist, also interviewed in the film, disclosed those risks as early as 1972. The case of polyvinyl chloride, it appears, is similar to that of asbestos: in each case an entire industry, involving many thousands of workers and huge investments of capital, grew up on the basis of a chemical that was relatively cheap, impressively versatile, and lethally carcinogenic.

Like Michael Moore, who ended his film about the sad decline of the automobile industry by confronting GM’s elusive CEO face-to-face, Judith Helfand is able to manage a happy ending, at least on a small scale: her toxic odyssey ends with the vinyl siding on her parents’ house replaced by a new substance, made from compressed corn fiber, and therefore harmless and biodegradable. By adapting Moore’s engaging approach for her own subject, Helfand and her collaborator Daniel Gold have succeeded in performing the difficult trick of making a technical and serious subject accessible to a broad audience.

“*Blue Vinyl*” (2002), directed by Judith Helfand and Daniel B. Gold. Produced by Toxic Comedy Pictures. Released by Bullfrog Films.

## Announcements

### New Editor at Kansas Press

The University of Kansas Press is pleased to announce that Kayani Fernando has joined the press as Acquisitions Editor. She will acquire books in environmental and natural history, Native American studies, Western history, and American studies (including the Culture/America series). A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, she most recently served as Associated Editor for the History Book Club in New York City.

### Historical Research Associates, Inc. Announces Ownership Transition

Historical Research Associates, Inc. (HRA), a consulting firm that works in environmental history and is an institutional member of ASEH, has completed an ownership transition. ASEH members Alan Newell (HRA president) and Lisa Mighetto (former HRA vice president) are among the owners who have sold their shares to a new group of employees that includes Emily Greenwald and Matt Godfrey, also ASEH members.

HRA employs historians and archaeologists and provides expert witness services in environmental, land use, and Native American rights litigation; research services for cultural resource inventory and permitting; compliance with archaeological and historic resources regulations; historic preservation planning; and research and writing of corporate and government history publications. Recent projects include a book-length history of Point Reyes National Seashore and an oral history of the US Army Corps of Engineers' tribal liaison program. HRA's 45-member staff is headquartered in Missoula, Montana, and the company has branch offices in Seattle, Washington and Portland, Oregon. HRA also has an ownership interest in a Houston, Texas, firm and is affiliated with offices in Cincinnati, Ohio; Richmond, Virginia; and Wakefield, Rhode Island.

### Call for Articles

ABC-CLIO is in the process of developing a comprehensive 21-volume *Encyclopedia of World History*. We are seeking writing contributions from interested scholars. We are still looking for writers to prepare 500-1500 word articles with a global perspective in the area of Environmental History. Contributors who write up to 5,000 words will receive writing credits and free access to the online version of the completed encyclopedia.

Environmental History Topics:

#### 1945 to present

Habitat Loss (600 words)  
 Pollution-global perspective (800)  
 Ocean Pollution (800) coral reef degradation/sidebar (200)  
 Development of Oceanography (800)  
 The Environment and Export Agriculture (600 words) Primates, Gorillas and Chimps (500)  
 Zoos (800) sidebar: Zoo breeding programs (200)  
 Forced Collectivization of Agriculture (600 words)  
 Impact of Rapid Economic Growth (600 words)  
 Impact of War on the Environment (600 words)  
 Volcanoes (Natural Disasters) (600) sidebar: Ring of Fire (200)  
 Cyclones (natural disasters) (600) sidebar: historic examples (200)  
 Subsistence Farming (500)

Destruction of Fishing Stocks (500)  
 Whaling Industry and Opposition (500)  
 Strip Mining the Sea (800)  
 Salination of water supplies and land. (500 words)

#### 1900-1945

The Environment and Export Agriculture (600 words)  
 Forced Collectivization of Agriculture (600)  
 Environmental Impact of Rapid Economic Growth (600)  
 Impact of War on the Environment (600)  
 Irrigation Societies/Colonies (600)

#### 1750-1914

Climate and Human Mortality, 1750-1820 (1500 words)  
 The Beginnings of Global Warming: 1860s-1914 (600)  
 Climate and Revolution in France (600)  
 Climate and the Painter's Eye (600)  
 Changing Patterns of Land Use in Colonial Africa (600)  
 Changing Patterns of Land Use in Colonial Asia (600)  
 Deforestation as a World Phenomenon (1000)  
 Chinese Agriculture: Land Issues and Population Growth (800)  
 The Emergence of the Ranch in the American West (600-700)  
 Worldwide Irrigation Projects (800)  
 Population Growth and Environmental Degradation in China (600)  
 Smoke and Smoke Abatement (800)  
 Carbon, Sulfur, Heavy Metals in the Air (600)  
 Human Impact on the Water Cycle, 1750-1914 (1000)  
 Plant and Animal Life under Siege: Extinctions and near-extinctions (1000)  
 The Rise and Fall of the Worldwide Whaling Industry(600)  
 Polluted Waterways: The Thames River and London's "Big Stink" of 1858 (600)  
 War and the Environment: The American Civil War (600)  
 The Romantic Movement and Nature (1000)  
 The Beginnings Environmental Movement: Marsh; Haeckel; von Humboldt (1000)  
 Early Environmental Organizations: Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Arbor Day Foundation, Commons Protection Society, etc (1000)  
 American Transcendentalism and Nature (600)

If you are interested in writing one or more of these entries, please send a c.v. and, if possible, a short writing sample to Fred Nadis and/or Monique Vallance:

<FNadis@abc-clio.com>

<MVallance@abc-clio.com>

Fred Nadis, Ph.D., Writer-Editor, World History Encyclopedia, ABC-CLIO, P.O. Box 1911, Santa Barbara, CA 93116-5505. Phone: 805.968.1911, ext 132, 800.368.6868, ext 132

### Conferences and Calls for Papers (Non-ASEH)

#### Third Latin American and Caribbean Environmental History Conference a Success in Carmona, Spain

By Sterling Evans, Brandon University (Manitoba)

Following the success of two earlier meetings (Santiago, Chile in 2003, and Havana, Cuba in 2004), the Sociedad Latinoamericana y

see **Announcements** page 6

from **Announcements** page 5

Caribeña de Historia Ambiental, or SOLCHA, met in the beautiful and historic Andalusian village of Carmona, Spain, on April 6-8, 2006. Hosting the event were historians and students from the Universidad Olavide en Carmona, whose work in organizing engaging panels on many facets of Latin American and Caribbean environmental history was matched only by their attention to ensuring that conferees enjoyed tours of Carmona's historic sites (with structures dating back to Carthaginian, Roman, and Moorish eras), scenery, food, and wine. All of us who attended applaud their efforts in making the conference such a successful and enjoyable event!

Delegates attending and presenting papers came from a wide variety of countries: Spain, Austria, Italy, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Venezuela, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Many of the sessions dealt with issues



Conference attendees at supper in the conference hotel, Carmona, Spain. Photo courtesy Roberto Delpiano

surrounding the conference theme of "Environmental History, An Instrument for Sustainability," while other panels considered topics ranging from Andean conservation, tropical forest preservation, the history of the Green Revolution, export agriculture, and many other topics. Indeed, environmental history is a fast growing discipline in Latin America and the Caribbean and among Latin Americanists and Caribbeanists everywhere.

At the SOLCHA business meeting delegates decided that the conference would take place every two years, with the next conference to take place in spring of 2008 in La Paz, Baja California Sur (Mexico), and in 2010 in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais (Brazil). "SOLCHeros" extend a warm invitation to all in the ASEH to attend these events!

**Call for Papers, American Association for the History of Medicine, 80th Annual Meeting, Montreal, Quebec, May 3-6, 2007**

The American Association for the History of Medicine invites abstracts for papers in any area of medical history for its 80th annual meeting, to be held in Montreal, Quebec, 3-6 May 2007. The Association welcomes submissions on the history of health and healing; history of medical ideas, practices, and institutions; and histories of illness, disease, and public health. Submissions from all eras and regions of the world are welcome. Besides single-paper proposals, the program committee accepts abstracts for three-paper sessions and for luncheon workshops. Please alert the Program Committee chair (<pteigen@nih.gov>) if you are planning a session proposal. Individual papers for these submissions will be judged on their own merits.

When making an historical argument state the major claim, summarize the evidence supporting it, and state the major conclusion(s). When proposing a narrative, summarize the story, identify the major agents, and specify the conflict.

The AAHM uses an online abstract submissions system. It is located at . Abstracts – none longer than 350 words – *must be received by 15 September 2006*. E-mail or faxed proposals are not acceptable. Presentations are limited to 20 minutes. Individuals wishing to present a paper must attend the meeting. All papers must represent original work not already published or in press. Because the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* is the official journal of the AAHM, the Association encourages speakers to make their manuscripts available for consideration by the *Bulletin*.

For more information, contact Philip M. Teigen, Program Committee Chair, History of Medicine Division, MSC 3819, National Library of Medicine, 8600 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20894. E-mail: <pteigen@nih.gov>, phone: 301.496.5407.

**Call for Papers, Northeast Workshop on Southern Africa 2007**

This is the first call for papers and participation for the Seventh Northeast Workshop on Southern Africa (NEWSA). We encourage scholars from all disciplines who are currently working on southern Africa (Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe) to submit proposals. The meeting will be held at the Bishop Booth Conference Center in Burlington, Vermont (US), between April 13 and April 16, 2007.

The NEWSA conference is organized around intensive discussion of pre-circulated papers. There are also many opportunities for informal conversation of work-in-progress. Located on 130 acres of forest with its own secluded beach, the center is an ideal location for discussion and conversation. Drawing on the successful precedents of the former Southern African Research Program at Yale and the Canadian Research Consortium on Southern Africa, this program is designed to give southern Africanists the opportunity for close and intensive discussion of work across a wide variety of scholarly fields. We encourage the presentation of previously unpublished work, and submissions from graduate students and junior faculty in particular.

If you wish to give a paper, your proposal should include a title and one- to two-paragraph abstract. *Completed papers, not to exceed forty pages, will be due March 15, 2007*, so that the papers can be pre-circulated on a conference website ahead of the meeting.

If you wish to serve as a discussant, your proposal should indicate the areas of southern African studies on which you are most prepared to comment. Once the conference participants are selected and organized into panels, each panel will be assigned a discussant. Discussants thoroughly read the pre-circulated papers by the participants in their session, and at the conference give a 10-15 minute constructive criticism/comment on the papers individually and collectively. Discussants also coordinate discussion of the papers amongst those attending the panel.

For Further Information on Themes, Registration, and Other Topics, please subscribe to our e-mail list. To do this, send an email to <majordomo@southwestern.edu>. The body of your email should read: subscribe su-newsa

For the latest updated information on the conference, see the NEWSA web site at <<http://www.southwestern.edu/~greenmue/news-a-07-program.html>>

## ASEH Fundraising Campaigns

ASEH has initiated two new fundraising campaigns, described below.

### New ASEH Fellowship for Graduate Students – Hal K. Rothman Award

ASEH is pleased to announce the creation of the Hal K. Rothman Fellowship, to be given annually for the best graduate student research proposal, defined in the broadest sense. ASEH will appoint a committee to select the winner and will administer the fellowship. ASEH anticipates that the award will consist of \$1,500 and a certificate for the student.

This fellowship carries Hal's name in recognition of his outstanding publication record, his dedicated service to ASEH, and

his long and productive editorship of *Environmental History*. Of equal importance, many ASEH members have mentioned how Hal has long been an unofficial ambassador for the Society, welcoming new graduate student attendees to meetings and making them feel like the vital participants ASEH believes them to be.

The fellowship will be supported by contributions from members and other individuals. We hope to raise \$25,000 to launch this initiative. Please help us make this fellowship a true success. To facilitate contributions, please use the form below.

Kathleen A. Brosnan  
 Mark Cioc  
 Char Miller  
 Adam Rome  
 Co-chairs, Hal K. Rothman Fellowship Fund



#### HAL K. ROTHMAN FELLOWSHIP FUND

- \$1,000 or installments of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ every \_\_\_\_ years
- (ASEH can accept installments of \$100 or more)
- \$500 or installments of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ every \_\_\_\_ years
- \$250 or installments of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ every \_\_\_\_ years
- \$100
- \$50
- other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Checks should be made payable to the ASEH, with "Hal Rothman Fellowship" on the memo line, and sent to:

ASEH Treasurer Mark Madison  
 698 Conservation Way  
 Shepherdstown, WV 25443

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

### Matching Fund Campaign for Executive Director

The Executive Committee, following discussions at the annual meeting at St Paul, has voted to appoint Lisa Mighetto as a full-time Executive Director with an initial contract of four years. Currently half-time in that role, Lisa will assume her new position in January. This is a move the Committee has reviewed for several years and believes is vital for the growth of the ASEH. The appointment will be discussed at the ASEH Business Meeting in Baton Rouge, which is open to all members.

Meanwhile, an anonymous donor has offered to contribute \$10,000 to our Executive Director fund if ASEH members can match that amount by the end of 2006. We intend to satisfy the terms of this generous offer and several members of the Executive Committee are organizing a campaign. Please send checks or pledges to Mark Madison [see form below].

With thanks for your assistance,

Steve Pyne  
 President, ASEH



#### FUND TO ENDOW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ASEH

I would like to contribute the following amount:

- \$1,000
- \$500
- \$250
- \$100
- \$50
- \$25
- other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Checks should be made payable to the ASEH, with "ASEH Executive Director Endowment Fund" on the memo line, and sent to:

ASEH Treasurer Mark Madison  
 698 Conservation Way  
 Shepherdstown, WV 25443

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

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  - Baton Rouge Conference: Update
  - Film Review
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**ASEH News** 

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**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 II

[Part I appeared in the spring issue of *ASEH News*]

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

Environmental historians of the African Diaspora have turned to other sub-disciplines in history to enhance analyses of the environment. Sharla Fett's *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (2002) and Kenneth Kiple's *The Caribbean Slave: A Biological History* (2002), both histories of medicine, along with Bonnie Lynn Sherow's *Red Earth: Race and Agriculture in Oklahoma Territory* (2004), an agricultural history, are sources for cross-pollination within the discipline of history and more research that helps to define the meaning of the environment for people of the African Diaspora.

In the spring 2006 edition of *ASEH News*, a number of scholars responded to a series of questions concerning African Americans, the African Diaspora, and the environment drawing from such scholarship:

- What is African American environmental history?
- How have the experiences of African Americans been distinctive in environmental history?
- What are the benefits of looking to other disciplines and exploring interdisciplinary perspectives in developing methodology and more?
- What can African Diaspora history and studies contribute to further developing African American environmental history?

Continuing here with Part II, a number of scholars and leaders have considered another set of questions that focus on the comparative, pedagogy, community service, and the future concerning African American environmental history.

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

#### What types of comparative studies can be developed?

Historians have long accepted that "environment" is a culturally constructed concept: environmental historians' longstanding debate over the changing meaning of "wilderness" certainly demonstrates this. Time, however, is not the only variable in how people conceive of, use, and attempt to change, their surroundings. Certainly ethnicity, class, and gender play a determinative role in views of the environment. In *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967), Roderick Nash demonstrates that early American elite white men interpreted wilderness on a variety of levels—as something to be conquered, tamed, manipulated for resources or occasionally appreciated for aesthetic value. On the

other hand, from my research, many nineteenth century slave women saw wilderness as a haven from the horrors and oppression of slavery: for them, wilderness existed as a place of escape, and a source of food and medicine for their families. These women also frequently recognized that surrounding wild areas brought fear (from the presence of the supernatural) and also physical violence (from other humans or animals). Comparative studies often illuminate these types of differences. In many ways, of course, comparative studies as a course of investigation hold frustrations. Unlike a scientific experiment, variables involving people cannot simply be evaluated one by one. We cannot, for example, observe only the differences between whites and African Americans without also having to factor class and gender, along with other important factors, into the discussion at the same time. Despite this qualification, comparative studies can certainly help historians understand how a multitude of factors affect cultural construction of the environment at various points in time.

Generally, comparative studies have been used to emphasize differences between ethnicities. In the case of African Americans, of course, work tends to center around the detrimental effects of Jim Crow and other forms of racism. Yet, comparative studies in environmental history can also reveal some striking similarities between people. For example, in my work on white and African American women in environmental activism, I found that both groups tend to adopt environmental causes out of concern for the health and safety of their children and families. This similarity even slips across class lines, as well, for both groups. Granted, African American women also faced racism prevalent in society, and pressed for environmental change as a way to improve the condition of African Americans in general. However, both sets of women expressed overriding, similar concerns for their children and families. Perhaps, then, comparative studies can, at least on one level, provide hope for the future and hope for common connections as we strive to eliminate all forms of discrimination in society.

Elizabeth D. Blum, History Department, Troy University

#### How can we make connections with the community outside academe through public history, community service, and policymaking with our increasing pool of knowledge?

African American environmental history roots African Americans engaged in the Environmental Justice Movement to a time and space that has been unclear to activists and advocates in their struggles and advocacy. From the first environmental justice struggle by an African American community in Warren County, North Carolina in 1982, African Americans have been trying to show their connection to their land, and thereby, to protect it. For the past twenty-five years, African Americans have been creating a new environmental history, without a full understanding of and connection to their past environmental history in the United States.

African American historians can aide individuals, groups, and communities to connect the past with the future. This can help guide present actions. Policy processes includes the identification of alternatives, such as programs or spending priorities, and choosing among them on the basis of the impact they will have. Through the publicizing of historic land connections, whether through ownership or through labor, organizers, advocates and policy makers can use this public history to mitigate the impact of environmental degradation in African American communities.

Through community based participatory research, African Americans groups such as churches, neighborhood organizations, community residents, and other social organizations, can help researchers to identify areas of research, play a direct role in the design and conduct of the research, and assist in the accumulation of the data. By reflecting on the historical, political, cultural, economic and geographic contexts, community members can come into the research as partners—not as just subjects but as true partners. The knowledge gained of the community can help the community understand its issues and/or problems and benefits. This would create a sense of empowerment in the community and result in better distribution of historical findings amongst the layperson communities and often put the newfound knowledge in the hands of those who are the decision-makers. The Environmental Justice Movement with the mantra "We speak for ourselves" is particularly important. In this arena, it can be used for a genuine democratic African American historical review process to address problems at hand. The uses would only be restricted by commitment and creativity.

*Michelle DePass, Community and Resource Unit, The Ford Foundation*

In June 1903, Colonel Charles Young and ninety-three Buffalo Soldiers from the Ninth United States Cavalry rode twelve days from the Presidio in San Francisco to the lofty heights of Sequoia National Park in the High Sierra Mountains. Their mission was to protect the 2,000 year-old Giant Sequoias from the ranchers and sawmill operators who saw the land primarily as a source of timber and grazing. Their accomplishments in Sequoia/Kings Canyon, and later in Yosemite National Park were vital to the conservation of these iconic American landscapes. In the mid-1800s, while yet enslaved, brothers Mat and Nick Brandsford, along with Stephen Bishop, were the principal explorers and guides of the world's longest cave system, now Mammoth Cave National Park. In 1897, "Parson" Jones and his wife Mozelle, bought Porgy Key in Biscayne Bay, Miami, for \$300. The couple's two sons, King Arthur and Sir Lancelot, rounded out a family that would proceed to buy Totten Key and part of Rhodes Keys, and develop a lime and pineapple plantation that supplied the Key West market. Resisting development efforts, Sir Lancelot said he sold Porgy Key to the National Park Service in 1974 as a place for people to return to nature.

These practical illustrations of the relationships that African Americans have had with public lands and the environment have a magical effect on communities of color and the general public. African Americans in particular, who have for so long been "whited out" of the picture, resonate to them. In Miami, for example, a diverse group of Community Partners has taken ownership of the Jones story, resulting in its inclusion in an upcoming Ken Burns documentary about the National Park System. For starters, these stories need to be publicized. They give



Audrey Peterman of Earthwise Productions, Inc. at the Cascade Springs Nature Preserve in Georgia. *Photo courtesy Dianne D. Glave.*

us leverage to demand further exploration of the African American contributions to our public lands system, and to require that they be prominently placed in the literature and all products of the public land management system. The land does not lie, and so to unearth these stories and juxtapose them against the prevailing stereotypes can do wonders in creating a more truthful and realistic picture of *American* environmentalism.

*Audrey Peterman, Earthwise*

### **How can we teach "African Americans and the Environment" through historical and/or interdisciplinary perspectives?**

The Great Black Migration: Literature, History, and the Environment

Course Description:

Between 1910 and 1930, more than one million African Americans migrated from the rural South to the urban North. Since the publication of slave narratives, these migrants' stories remain a pervasive theme in American literary history. This course is an interdisciplinary study of literary, environmental, musical, journalistic, and artistic representations of African Americans' mass exodus from south to north, and at times, from south to mid-west. We will explore how migrants dealt with overcrowded tenement houses, environmental hazards, and job discrimination as they migrated to urban cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and St. Louis in search of better economic opportunities and political freedom.

Texts include:

Literary:

- Paul Laurence Dunbar, *The Sport of the Gods* (1902)
- James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912; 2nd publication 1927)
- Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1928)
- Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (1945)
- Ann Petry, *The Street* (1946)

- Ishmael Reed, *Flight to Canada* (1976)
- Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (1992)

Artistic:

- Jacob Lawrence's *Migration Series*

Journalistic:

- Excerpts from *The Chicago Defender*, as well as actual migrant letters published in the *Journal of Negro History*

Rynetta Davis, *English Department, University of Kentucky*

"African Americans and the Environment from Interdisciplinary Perspectives" is a course in the tradition of African American Studies as a discipline. The following is a fragment of the syllabus:

Description:

In this class, we will focus on history, the emphasis here, along with literature, music, film, art, and photography. As an upper division undergraduate course, we will explore the historical ramifications of human interaction of African Americans with the environment, along with interdisciplinary perspectives. The class will be divided into four parts: class discussions, writing workshops, on-line posts/discussions, and two fieldtrips.

Reading:

- Environmental History and Environmental Justice: Dianne Glave's and Mark Stoll's, eds., *"To Love the Wind and the Rain:" African Americans and Environmental History* (2006) and Steve Lerner's *Diamond: A Struggle for Environmental Justice in Louisiana's Petrochemical Corridor* (2005)
- Novels: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923)
- Music: Michael Jackson's "Earthsong," Stevie Wonder's "Village Ghetto Land," Kanye West's "Diamonds From Sierra Leone, featuring Jay-Z," Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit," Common's "The Corner," and Marvin Gaye's "Mercy Mercy Me"
- Film: "Beloved," "Training Day," and "Daughters of the Dust"
- Art: Dox Thrash, John Biggers, and Clementine Hunter
- On-line primary sources including the Booker T. Washington Papers and the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs

The course will be framed around African American Studies pedagogy, modeled after "Introduction to African American Studies," with an interdisciplinary emphasis organizing the class thematically rather than chronologically: historiography or literature review, history, environmental justice, literature, music, film, and art.

*Dianne D. Glave*

A Syllabus for African American Environmental Thought

Exploring African American environmental thought can give us insight into how African Americans have interpreted the landscape and their relationship to the natural world. But it is also a good

source for theoretical arguments concerning how racial oppression has affected stewardship and the meaning of the landscape—claims that environmental historians may wish to investigate.

This syllabus is based on a book project, some pieces of which have been published in *Environmental Ethics*. Those articles and the book will, I hope, provide useful analyses of the following texts—with the exception of George Washington Carver's writings. Carver's environmental thought is complex and idiosyncratic, and has not yet received the scholarly attention it deserves. It is nonetheless too interesting to leave out. Two caveats are in order: First, I'm not sure I would attempt to teach such a course. Approaching African American environmental thought as a tradition independent of American thought generally is problematic; these writers were very much in conversation with white writers and white audiences—particularly when they were talking about the natural world. Much of the richness of their texts is lost when we only hear one side of the conversation. Second, this syllabus represents my interpretation of the *major* themes in African American environmental thought, up to about 1940 (my research doesn't extend to the contemporary era). But African American writers were writing constantly about humans' relationship to nature; there is a wealth of material that I haven't had the opportunity to explore.

The Racial Landscape:

- *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb* (1849)

The Environmental Critique of Slavery:

- Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, Letter IX (1781)
- Frederick Douglass, "Speech to the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association" (1873)
- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, "On the Quest of the Golden Fleece" (1903)

The African Wilderness:

- Edward Blyden, "The African Problem and Its Method of Solution," *African American Social and Political Thought, 1850-1920* (1890, 1992)

Race and the American Environment:

- Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race* (selections) (1924)
- Joseph Tillinghast, *The Negro in Africa and America* (1902)
- Kelly Miller, *Race Adjustment* (1908) (selections)
- Albert Barnes, "Negro Art and America," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (1925)
- Locke, "The Negro Youth Speaks" and "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts" in *The New Negro* (1925)

Case Study: The Environmental Thought of W.E.B. Du Bois:

- Du Bois, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911)
- Du Bois, *Darkwater*, "Of Beauty and Death" (1920)

- Du Bois, "The Criteria of Negro Art," in *Writings of W.E.B. Du Bois* (1986)

Case Study: The Environmental Thought of George Washington Carver:

- *George Washington Carver: In His Own Words*, ed. Gary Kremer (1987)

A Sense of Place I: The South in Black Literature:

- Jean Toomer, *Cane* (1923)
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

A Sense of Place II: The Urban Landscape:

- Alain Locke, "The New Negro" in *The New Negro* (1925)
- Richard Wright, *Native Son* (1940)

Kimberly Smith, *Political Science, Carleton College*

**Conclusion: What is the future of this scholarship?**

The range of accomplishments, possibilities, and hopes that are acknowledged and celebrated in this conversation about African American environmental history proclaims that this is a field that has begun to bloom. These essays set an agenda as well. African American traditions of land and resource use, of environmental values, and of environmental activism have not yet been explored fully by historians. How environmental problems and strategies for confronting them are defined require attention to the vulnerabilities and concerns of African Americans, especially in places where economic and social policy have been influenced or shaped by what we used to call race. The policies created by various government agencies for defining and developing natural resources also needs to acknowledge the history of the struggle of African Americans to gain equal access to resources as well as their unique perspective on the "wild" and what it means.

Future scholarship in this burgeoning new field, as these essays at least implicitly make clear, will not be able to simply add blacks and mix. Nor will it be enough for this scholarship to identify an African American perspective on environmental history, so that African Americans will—with more than a nod to the most venerable of American political traditions—be represented in equal terms. Scholars who want to recover African American relationships to nature to reify an ethic of closeness to and reverence for nature among African Americans in the past will also not go far enough. A scholarship that produces an Ecological Brother (and Sister) might well be as distorted and misleading as the cultural trends (and sometimes, scholarship) that have targeted another "other" to express the wishes and fears of mainstream Americans—the Ecological Indian. It will also risk replicating, on the other hand, past representations of Africans in America as close to nature because they were "beasts," not civilized enough to rise above it—with the history of racism, in other words. Scholars need to identify the particular textures of how African Americans "knew" nature—and then how African Americans used that knowledge to build autonomy and community for themselves—and to use not just written texts to do so, but also to re-create how African Americans read the landscape itself and expressed that reading with their behavior. How African Americans used their knowledge as a weapon of resistance, for example, needs more attention—the intimate geography of antebellum *marronage*,



Wangari Maathai, a 2004 Nobel Prize Receptient, touching the flower of a willow planted after a Special Convocation at Morehouse College on March 24, 2006. *Photo courtesy Dianne D. Glave.*

"laying out," and visiting with "broad wives" and family members, for example, which later was transformed into a landscape of self-emancipation and became the foundation of African American contributions to the efforts of the Union Army during the Civil War; African Americans did not simply vote with their feet but wielded their intimate understanding of local environments to vote with their feet. A scholarship that focuses on African American environmental history will recover a unique history, one that often tests and problematizes the history of other Americans and the environment, and that also will have an integrity all of its own. This will be a history beyond what we used to call "race relations," and toward a history that is as separate as it is connected to other American histories. This history may also circle back to a common ground that everyone shares—as Elizabeth Blum reports, women regardless of ethnic or class background have shared concerns about environmental hazards and the health of their children. By asking questions about differences, and by comparing the history of African American experiences with the environment to those of others, scholars may discover some common ground, a core of sensibilities and values—a biophilia, if you will—that is shared by us all. African American environmental history will also enrich the already substantial body of scholarship about African Americans that scholars have produced in the last half-century, especially if a great deal more dialogue between environmental historians and historians of the American South begins to take place, and will bring nature back into a story from which it should never have been subtracted.

*Mart Stewart, Department of History, Western Washington University*

Special thanks to John McLachlan, Weatherhead Distinguished Professor and Director of the Center for Bioenvironmental Research (CBR) along with the administration, faculty, and staff in the CBR and the Environmental Studies Program at Tulane University through the support of the J. Aron Foundation that allowed me to edit these essays among other projects from 2004 to 2006.

*Dianne D. Glave*