

*Global Environmental History: An Introductory Reader*. McNeill, J. R., and Alan Roe, eds. London/ New York: Routledge, 2013. ISBN: 978041552053 (paperback).

Global environmental history is tricky. Arguably, it combines the benefits and challenges of both, world and environmental history: a global “bird’s eyes” view of the history of the whole world while focusing on interactions between nature and humans. In the edited volume, *Global Environmental History: An Introductory Reader*, editors J. R. McNeill and Alan Roe take on that “daunting prospect and [...] logical endeavor” (xiii) – together with a variety of scholars. Their efforts make for an accessible, nicely organized, and clearly written volume that is ultimately successful in providing “a measure of orientation and introduction to the nascent field of global environmental history” (xviii).

The editors themselves put forward a helpful introduction, meant to inform readers about a plethora of past, present, and possibly future focal points within the field. It begins with a broad historiography around a possible definition for global environmental history before proposing three principle areas of inquiry: (1) the study of environmental change; (2) cultural and intellectual environmental history; and, (3) political and policy-related environmental history (xiv). McNeill and Roe then outline the diversity of different approaches, ranging from discussions of the Columbian Exchange, fire, and empires, to deforestation and diseases. Though only eleven pages of text, this section gives newcomers a valuable overview and mentions key scholars and volumes in the field; it also offers those familiar with the discipline useful points of reference or food for thought. The introduction concludes by stating the objectives of the book and adding an obligatory preview of upcoming chapters.

The book itself is organized along three main sections, beginning with “Global Perspectives.” Here, late geoscientist and archeologist William Dickinson discusses legacies of the Holocene, rightfully pointing to “the seductive notion that the world was a pristine place before people gradually hewed their way into it” (8). Others write about marine environmental history, fire, animals, ecological imperialism, and the importance of a gender analysis. Several submissions in this section come from well-known environmental historians and scholars, including Alfred Crosby, Carolyn Merchant, and Stephen Pyne. Newcomers and experts alike will appreciate (re)-reading these excerpts together with the works of less-known scholars.

Part II then takes a more regional perspective. Readers can learn about Latin American mining, Russian environmental history, and ecology and culture in West Africa. As is generally the case when it comes to edited volumes, each reader will be drawn to different topics – this reviewer found environmental historian Joachim Radkau’s discussion of a European ‘special path’ when it comes to environmental history surprisingly thought-provoking. That is the beauty of edited volumes, of course, and its limitation given that we might all have hoped for more on a certain topic.

In the third and final part, titled “Environmentalisms,” scholars engage with different approaches to this complex field. Environmental historian William Cronon’s widely known essay, and must-read for scholars well beyond the discipline, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” is featured here. This part also has an excerpt from the Indian scholar Ramachandra Guha and his discussion of critiques emerging out of the so-called third world – an important addition given the euro/

western-centric bias and perspective repeatedly lingering within environmental and world history. Those two pieces in themselves thus capture the diversity of approaches available to the reader in this section of the book – only further supplemented by essays on Brazil and Japan.

Meant to target a broad audience of students, teachers, and the public, *Global Environmental History* is a wonderful collection of essays. Although all its short pieces have appeared in some form elsewhere – an aspect, together with the price of the book that might deter some readers from purchasing this volume – this reviewer was pleased to find them all combined in a handy format. That, in a way, ultimately offers the opportunity of delving into different chapters or sections, in sequence, based on personal preference and interest, or, at random. The editor's concise and accessible introduction is useful and much needed, especially for those new to this field – and who is not given the wide array of geographic regions, approaches, and arguments presented here? A conclusion might have been worthwhile because of that, and to potentially help readers see connections not apparent otherwise. Of course, and as noted already, each reader would have liked to see more on a specific topic. This reviewer, for what it is worth, felt an essay on environmental justice, even climate justice, would have been beneficial; others might have liked to see more on food production. Luckily, there are similar volumes available, including the concise introduction by Ramachandra Guha titled *Environmentalism: A Global History* (1999). Other publications are following a chronological framework, like I. G. Simmon's *Global Environmental History* (2008) or Donald Hughes' *An Environmental History of the World* (2009). Then, there are those volumes that come from a more distinct World history approach, namely *The Environment in World History* (2010) or *The Origins of the Modern World* (2015). Plus, there are thousands of essays on a diverse set of topics, all of which are meant for endless indulging with a clearly vibrant, certainly exciting, and gradually more essential field of inquiry.

Martin Kalb  
Bridgewater College