

*Out of the Woods: Essays in Environmental History*, Char Miller and Hal Rothman, eds.  
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*Out of the Woods* is a collection of essays from the *Environmental History Review*, brought together to display the increasing complexity and vitality of the field of environmental history. The book looks back through roughly two decades of the *Environmental History Review*, bringing together scholarship from the late 1970s to the middle of the 1990s, and provides a look at some of the major work in this evolving field of history as it stood circa 1997. Indeed, it is important to keep in mind when *Out of the Woods* was published as it is now somewhat dated; this is not a critique of the quality of the work in the book, merely an important thing to note. Much of the scholarship on display here are regarded as classic works in the field of environmental history, displaying the broadening interdisciplinary scholarship that was a point of pride for historians then. However, when *Out of the Woods* was created the works selected spanned the total chronology of the field itself, and what was cutting edge then is somewhat common knowledge now.

While the book moves in a roughly chronological order the main method of organization is thematic, dividing the essays into six thematic sections (chapters, for lack of a better word) of three essays each. *Out of the Woods* begins with a selection of work on the importance of “ideas” in environmental history. William Cronon, a giant in the field of environmental history, is represented in this section with his classic essay on the creation of “wilderness” as an unpopulated land that can fix societal problems. Similarly, Carolyn Merchant and Donald Worster, two more noted names in the field, argue about the meaning of ideas like “ecology” and

their impact on the world in this section. As *Out of the Woods* progresses, however, the analyses become more grounded.

The second chapter, “Place Settings” focuses on the reciprocity between changes that happen in a landscape that people live on. Essays in this chapter, especially the one by Robert Maccameron on colonial New Mexico, are the kind of stereotypical environmental histories that one expects to read: deep analyses of specific locales’ environment over time. The third chapter provides a thorough examination of the “Green Politics” of the United States, as environmental legislation has become more and more important over the course of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Samuel P. Hays’ important essay on conservationism’s evolution to the modern environmentalism after World War II is represented here, as is Robert Gottlieb’s response to Hays’, debating the narrow view that Hays takes on political inclusion and broadening the environmental movement to include women, minorities, and the working class. The fourth chapter looks at “Urban Fields,” the complexities of how environment in the common sense and urban, human made environments interact and even overlap. Joel Tarr’s essay, for example, discusses urban pollution and its damaging effects on the environment, while Raymond Smilor’s shows how environmental “noise” led to urban and suburban complaints and even litigation. In the fifth chapter, “Water Works,” the relationship between human beings and aquatic environments is examined. This chapter highlights one of the main problems with *Out of the Woods*: it is extremely U.S. centric. Although the essays themselves are perfectly good scholarship, it is only in the last chapter that a more international set of studies are shown. Appropriately titled “Global Village,” this sixth, final chapter contains one of the only non-American or Euro-centric subjects in the entire book, a fascinating look at the usage and culture of fire in India by Stephen Pyne. The final chapter looks at the increasingly global aspects of

environmental history, displaying how scholarship increasingly is dedicating itself toward discussions of interconnectedness between environments, species, and humanity.

Overall, *Out of the Woods* is a worthwhile addition to the historiography on environmental history. It provides readers with a strong snapshot of the field of environmental history as it stood in the late 1990s, when the field was truly coming into its own. The collection of essays establishes the main trends as environmental history matured, taking the reader through the major topical and methodological advances that the field experienced. The length of the book and its decision to only include articles from the *Environmental History Review* limits its scope, however. Although the *EHR* is a major journal for the field, it does not encompass the entirety of scholarship on environmental history. Indeed, the most notable gap present in *Out of the Woods* is its overreliance on American centered studies, leaving out the wealth of, mainly, European scholars on environmental history. The last chapter makes up for this to an extent, but it is a flaw that cannot be ignored.

These critiques aside, the usefulness of *Out of the Woods* outweighs its downsides. It is a valuable collection of essays, many of them groundbreaking works, that informed the scholarly debates in environmental history in the field's most formative years. Beyond this, it provides readers with a critical examination of some of the intellectual grounding that informed the early development of environmental history as a new scholarly pursuit. The introduction and in-between chapter notations by the editors give much needed context to the creation of many of the essays, and allow the reader greater insight into the motivations of their authors and the evolution of the scholarship. *Out of the Woods* will be most useful for higher level undergraduate, graduate and, possibly, advanced high-school students in history classes or environmental studies courses.

The difficulty of the essays varies, and so a blanket recommendation is difficult. On the whole, the book lends itself towards a graduate level classroom, but suitably advanced students could tackle individual chapters or essays piecemeal or with appropriate guidance. Many of the concerns raised in the essays about environmental damage, pollution, and urban sprawl are, if anything, even more relevant and pressing than they were when *Out of the Woods* was first published, and provide a strong basis for fruitful discussions.

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