

Chad Montrie, *Making a Living: Work and Environment in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

Chad Montrie's *Making a Living: Work and Environment in the United States* provides an excellent overview of the field of environmental history as it intersects with labour history. This elegantly written book draws on six case studies: textile mill girls in antebellum New England, plantation slaves and newly freed sharecroppers in the Mississippi Delta, homesteading women in the Kansas and Nebraska grasslands, Native-born coal miners in southern Appalachia, auto workers in Detroit, and Mexican and Mexican-American farmworkers in southern California. Montrie focuses on how workers experience nature "by examining aspects of the historical relationship between labor and nature during the rise in advance of industrial capitalism in the United States"(6).

Montrie, a historian at University of Massachusetts-Lowell and the author of *To Save the Land and the People: A History of Opposition to Surface Coal Mining in Appalachia*, situates this book within developments in the field of environmental history. Specifically, he outlines the ways in which the field has integrated the concerns of labour history into its analysis: organized labour's participation in a number of public health, resource conservation, wilderness protection and modern environmental campaigns; in interpreting the history of human beings' relationship to nature with class as a category of analysis; and in theoretical discussions about connections between labour and nature. At the same time, he focuses on how the field of labour history has not incorporated the insights of environmental history. He also notes that "labor historians have focused exclusively on alienation as a matter of labor and social relations transformed... environmental historians have tended to see people's estrangement from nature as part of economic change, but without much attention to work" (7).

It is at this crossroads that Montrie's study is situated. The greatest strength, and concomitant weakness, is the case study approach. Each of these chapters contains a wealth of stories and major insights on the changing role of work and nature. However, given the broad number of differences between the workers and their work sites across time and space (Lowell mill girls, slaves and freedmen in Mississippi, women settlers in the grasslands, Appalachian coal miners in Appalachia, Detroit autoworkers and Mexican farmworkers), Montrie necessarily sacrifices depth for breadth. Why these stories were chosen and not others is not altogether clear. This slim book, just 131 pages, combines a number of fascinating stories, but after the introduction, the case studies stand alone, and the insights in each of the chapters do not build upon one another. This, despite the remarkable consistency in how the workers used nature. These ways included working in gardens and hunting and fishing in the wilderness—in other words, as a source of leisure and sustenance. In short, nature was a potential landscape (albeit one that was gendered and racialized differently) of freedom across the

constraints of the increasingly coercive workplace. For instance, in the chapter on Appalachians and their transition from the homestead to the mine, Montrie argues that “by gardening, keeping livestock and hunting and fishing, miners and their families... minimize[d] the degree of estrangement from nature required by the shift to industrial wage labor” (82).

The case studies highlighted by Montrie are incredibly important. The press release for the book focuses on how “increasingly organized and mechanized production drove a wedge between workers and nature and how workers fought back.” And indeed, that is a central part of the chapters on Appalachia, Detroit and California, which are the strongest. The story of Appalachia and its transformation (the subject of Montrie’s first book), and its impact on the land and the people is where the story of how capital interests used nature is most clear. Likewise, I wished the other case studies focused on how management and capital used nature in the workplace, rather than the author’s focus on how workers related to nature.

The impact of Walther Reuther and the UAW on modern environmentalism is an important story that questions the blue-green divide. Montrie traces out how the UAW was a leading proponent for environmental quality and in articulating the connection between a clean workplace and the broader environment. The UAW did so by sponsoring summer camps, anti-pollution activism to clean up the rivers, and through the work of Olga Madar, the UAW Conversation and Resource Development Department Director. Reuther’s speech alongside President Lyndon Johnson’s famous Great Society speech also highlighted this commitment: “we look at something much more fundamental the enrichment and the growth and the development of the human spirit and yet if we go on as we have been going on, we will destroy the kind of living environment in which the free human spirit can flourish [...]”. Reuther’s speech further called for clean water, purer air and livable cities, and for people to challenge recalcitrant governments and irresponsible industry (108). The chapter on Mexican-Americans and the United Farm Worker campaigns also provides a wealth of primary research that has much broader implications for the field of environmental justice. But, in calling the geographic area in question southern California, rather than the Central Valley—there are major political and historical differences between these two regions, the costs of limits of trading breadth for depth in the book become clear.

That said, Montrie’s study is indeed an important invention in environmental and labour history. In his brief conclusion, Montrie alludes to the broader implication of his cases, “As the 19th and 20th centuries progressed, many also found themselves living in environments polluted and poisoned by the very industries that gave them their jobs. Through it all, textile mill operatives, coal miners, migrant field hands, and others devised means of accommodation and resistance, drawing on inherited traditions, values, and beliefs as well as developing new ones” (130). He also points to the low numbers of unionized workers today, calling the

situation “dire and the future of labor environmentalism uncertain” (131). In this context, it is especially important that *Making a Living* has as wide readership, both in the academy and in social movements.

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Paul Kopas, *Taking the Air: Ideas and Change in Canada's National Parks* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007).

University of British Columbia political scientist Paul Kopas has taken on a difficult task—making sense of national parks policy since the mid-1950s. Serving as an historian in the Prairie and Northern Regional Office of Parks Canada in the early 1980s, I often wondered about the federal government's policy decisions. In fact, I was just figuring out how things apparently worked when I traded one bureaucracy for another by moving to a university. But I have always remained interested in national parks policy and history and that's why I read the Kopas book with such interest.

Taking the Air seeks to explain the development and evolution of national parks policy by examining the dominant contextualizing policy ideas during the latter half of the twentieth century. Kopas argues that these shifting or new ideas, although not usually stated in policy, have shaped and influenced national parks decision-making and legislation. The contextualizing idea of the 1970s, for example, was that the public should play a key role in policy formation and that such participation was considered both necessary and crucial; hence, any new park developments from 1970 to 1979, according to Kopas, were largely initiated by public participation (such as the review of management plans) and not by the bureaucracy.

Using contextualizing ideas as his analytical model, Kopas tries to identify the key concepts and contributing factors that have determined national parks policy since the end of the Second World War. He looks first at the early history of national parks in Canada and how the establishment of Banff in 1885, and six other parks in western Canada before 1900, had more to do with national development than with environmental protection. In fact, Kopas notes that even though the 1930 National Parks Act was unprecedented for its time, because of its ecological provisions, national parks in the first half of the twentieth century had a kind of split identity—existing as both nature preserves and recreational playgrounds. He also maintains that the environmental features of the act were never effectively implemented because of depression and war and that it fell to post-war planners to bring national parks in line with the 1930 legislation.

The better part of *Taking the Air* is devoted to the period from 1955 to the early twenty-first century and how the parks branch, then public participation,