"To Love the Wind and the Rain"

AFRICAN AMERICANS AND ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

EDITED BY

Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll

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around the buildings, the construction of wind breaks, placing ornamental flower beds, laying out walks, planting trees and shrubs, arranging and planting window boxes." Once again, African Americans had the opportunity to layer Progressive horticultural education upon community experiences.[21]

By using yards in different ways, African American women took possession of them. They manipulated and interpreted the spaces for sustenance, comfort, joy, and sometimes profit. African American wives, mothers, agents, community volunteers, and students created gardens that were both new and old, with practices that integrated tradition with Progressive practice.

Alice Walker reminisces about her mother, who planted a flower garden in the 1930s and 1940s, just after this Progressive period: "I remember people coming to my mother's yard to be given cuttings from flowers; I hear again the praise showered on her because whatever rocky soil she landed on, she turned into a garden. A garden so brilliant with colors, so original in its design, so magnificent with life and creativity, that to this day people drive by our house in Georgia—perfect strangers and imperfect strangers—and ask to stand or walk among my mother's art. I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible—except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have. Ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of Beauty."[22]

Other stories are waiting in the hands, arms, shoulders, and backs of these rural African American women like Walker's mother. More remains to be written about African American women in gardening, and indeed, about the history of rural African American interactions with the environment. How did African traditions in gardening cross the Atlantic into the yards of slaves and then sharecroppers? Did African American and white women differ in their gardening traditions and techniques? Did wealthier African American women tend more ornamental flower gardens and poorer women plant more food and vegetable gardens? Was there any evidence of "lifting as we climb" in gardening work, so pivotal in the African American women's club movement? Were southern gardening traditions transformed when African Americans migrated to cities like Los Angeles and Detroit? How did African Americans create their communal and personal urban and suburban gardens? Do any of those practices continue today, and in what context do things grow for African Americans who engage in gardening—this most fundamental interaction with nature?

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Turpentine Negro

CASSANDRA Y. JOHNSON and JOSH MCDANIEL

> In the pines, in the pines, where the sun never shines
> And I shiver when the cold wind blows.
> I asked my captain for the time of day, said he throwed
> His watch away. . . .
>
> —From the folksong "In the Pines"

Studies have documented the gap between African American and white interaction with the natural environment: generally, African Americans are less likely than whites to visit wildland recreation areas or to participate in forest-based outdoor recreation.[1] Other studies also indicate that African Americans show less environmental concern, although more recent work indicates similar concern levels. These differences have been found even when place of residence and access to wildland resources are controlled. Various explanations have been given to account for these differences, including ethnicity and marginality.[2] This chapter examines an aspect of marginality theory by examining African American labor in relationship to the land, specifically African American experiences working in southern forests in naval stores or turpentine operations.

It is important to explore the relationship African Americans had with the land through labor because woods work such as turpentine extraction may have historical importance for how contemporary African Americans interact with and view forested wildlands.[3] Southern, rural African Americans have a legacy of working and living in close proximity to forested wildlands. While this historical connection to forests through turpentining and other woods work provided African Americans with an intimate lay knowledge of plants, animals, and a general environmental understanding, the exploitation, abuse, and racism that accompanied the industry, and which persist in the contemporary southern forest industry, have resulted in a dramatic decrease in the

numbers of African Americans working in the forest. Just as important, we believe that African Americans' collective memory of land-based labor—particularly woods work involving turpentine extraction and other timber products—has contributed to reluctance among African Americans to engage in many forms of forest-based leisure time activities. Collective memory is knowledge held in common by a group of people. The memory is salient to the group and may be "known" by individuals with no firsthand experience of the event or events. In this sense it is a vicarious remembering that is handed down to successive generations through both public and private means.

These associations are not entirely linear because of mitigating factors that may counteract collective recollections. Despite the drudgery associated with woods work, African Americans have always gone to the woods to fish and to a lesser extent to hunt. As Elizabeth Blum maintains, though slaves were frightened of the woods, they also saw the woods as a safe hideaway from plantation overseers. Mart Stewart's scholarship on the agricultural transformation of coastal Georgia by European settlers and African slaves examines the environmental knowledge possessed by African Americans in the postbellum era and how African Americans used this social capital as a leverage to command better wages and working conditions. In terms of domesticated outdoor spaces, Dianne Glave and Richard Westmacott both describe how rural African American women applied their knowledge of nature to gardening and how these practices contributed to traditional, sustainable lifestyles.[4]

Contemporarily, however, there is a continuing chasm between African American and white engagement with the woods, despite substantial socioeconomic gains for the African American middle class in recent decades. The disparity seems to relate more to differences in acceptance of core American values rooted in the frontier ethic. The frontier ethic espouses ideals of American individualism and expansion, the individual (principally white male) constrained by neither law nor land to explore supposedly uncharted and uninhabited territories. White Americans were urged by early conservationists to venture to the frontier and remain there because this geography, the wild and semi-wild, is what made the unique American character.

The wilderness ideal and encouragement to settle the frontier were extended to African Americans begrudgingly. Although African Americans contributed considerably to the settlement of the western frontier (as fur traders, miners, agricultural workers, soldiers, cowboys), they nevertheless experienced anti–African American sentiment and hostility in these regions. Eugene Berwanger comments: "From the beginnings of their settlement the western free states and territories enacted stringent restrictions against free Negroes. . . . In fact, the illiberal racial attitudes in the Old Northwest caused Alexis de Tocqueville to comment in the 1830's that prejudice against Negroes was more extreme in 'those states where slavery has never been known.'"[5] Both pro- and antislavery forces campaigned against African American settlement in the West because of the idea that the western territories were the manifest destiny of whites.

African Americans and other oppressed groups formed a somewhat different relationship to the land based on their relative lack of access to it. For many African Americans, this relationship was severely restricted by racism and a resulting lack of economic, social, or political rights to land, including forested wildlands. The American ideal of wilderness exploration and engagement contributed less to African American identity formation than to that of most European groups. Again, this is not to gainsay the achievements of countless African American pioneers, who like their white counterparts, managed to thrive on the frontier. Still, the African American relationship to the woods, and most other natural lands, emerged from a context of exploitation that presently informs the African American relationship to wildlands.

The Turpentine Industry

Numerous accounts exist of African American work in the plantation economy, both before and after the Civil War, but comparatively little scholarship documents African American labor in naval stores operations. Post–Civil War turpentining, however, contributed significantly to African American southern labor history. Turpentine employment trailed only cotton and timber production in the number of wage earners employed between 1880 and 1930 and accounted for 6 percent of all wage earners in the South in 1900.

The descriptor "naval stores" originates from the colonial era when the British Navy used pine-derived resources such as tar, pitch, gum, turpentine, and rosin in shipbuilding and repair. The British made extensive use of virgin pine forests in the New England and Carolina colonies when their European supply was either depleted or threatened by war with other nations. Similar depletion of pines occurred in the northern American colonies, and the industry was forced to move steadily southward in search of new pine forests. During the antebellum period, mostly small farmers in North Carolina were involved in naval stores production. As demand for these products increased, the planter class moved into the industry in the 1830s and 1840s, and naval stores operations became part of the plantation economy. By the mid-nineteenth century, naval stores products ranked third in exports from the South behind cotton and tobacco. By 1860, roughly fifteen thousand slaves labored in the naval stores industry.

The majority of turpentine workers were African American, both before

and after the Civil War. Tegeder notes that in the postbellum period, naval stores operations employed the greatest percentage of African Americans. Most employers considered African Americans as particularly fit for the grueling tasks associated with the work.[6] In both 1910 and 1920, African Americans accounted for at least 80 percent of turpentine laborers in twelve southern states; in 1930, at least 80 percent of turpentiners in Florida, Georgia, and Mississippi were African American, and at least 70 percent were African American in South Carolina and Alabama. This type of labor market stratification continued well into the twentieth century with the establishment of turpentine camps throughout the South.

The monikers "Turpentine Negro" or "Turpentine Nigger" were common because African Americans were so closely identified with the work. One turpentine operator went so far as to develop a grading system for rosin, a turpentine by-product, that assigned value to rosin based on skin tones of African American turpentine workers and their families. The lighter, clearer rosin was considered to be of superior quality and commanded higher prices. The darker rosin brought lower prices. Robert Schultz describes the taxonomy: "The originator of the system picked out a very light skinned negress [*sic*] named Nance whose color matched his best rosin grade. Mary was next—slightly darker. Then Kate, Isaac, Harry, Frank, Edward, Dolly down to Betsy who was almost black."[7]

After the Civil War, naval stores operations moved from plantations to camps established by producers who secured financing for the operations. The industry also moved steadily southward as pine forests in the Carolinas became depleted. Turpentining took place in remote pine forests. The extraction of gum, or oleoresin, occurred from March or April until November. Workers used a set of specialized tools to debark trees and to "chip" or streak the face of the tree to stimulate gum flow. Chippers maintained a "drift" of trees (usually about five thousand), which they visited and streaked about once a week with a hack. The gum flowed into a receptacle that changed over time from simple boxes cut in the base of the tree to aluminum and clay cups that were hung on the tree beneath a system of metal gutters.

In later years, chippers also applied acid to the tree to stimulate flow.[8] Following the chippers were dippers who emptied the cups and boxes and filled barrels for transportation to the stills. Most turpentine operations divided labor between chippers, dippers, drivers, supervisors (or woods riders), and distillery workers. At the beginning and end of the work cycle, workers hung cups and gutters and raked around the trees to prevent destructive fires from killing the trees through their exposed faces.

Until the 1930s, turpentining was a purely extractive operation. The long-leaf and slash pine forests were viewed like minerals to be extracted rather than as renewable resources. Turpentining often preceded logging operations, and the trees were worked for three to six years before they were cut for timber.

Debt Peonage

Like many extractive industries throughout the world, the postbellum and twentieth-century turpentine industry relied heavily on cheap labor. In the late nineteenth century, demand for turpentine and other naval stores products increased significantly, but turpentine workers were scarce. To ensure a cheap and ready labor supply, turpentine agents recruited African Americans from the Carolinas who were familiar with turpentine operations to travel with the camps when the operations moved into the lower southeastern states. Labor shortages continued to be a problem around the turn of the century, and as noted above, foreign workers were recruited to help fill the demand. Repressive contract labor laws were also enacted in several southern states. These laws broadly defined vagrancy and essentially made it illegal for males over eighteen to be unemployed. Any man caught "idling" on the streets could be arrested and sentenced to a turpentine camp.

Turpentine workers and their families lived in camps established by operators or producers. These camps were reminiscent of the antebellum plantation system in which African Americans were absolutely dependent upon white operators for their livelihood. Producers provided for every aspect of the workers' existence in the camp, including housing, food, equipment, and supplies. In many instances, turpentine camps operated on a cashless basis. Employees were paid in company script that could be used only at company stores. Workers paid in actual money were still required to purchase all food and other necessities from the company store or commissary. New arrivals to the camps were often advanced food and other supplies with the expectation that the costs for the goods would be subtracted from subsequent salaries. Because of extremely low wages (either on a piecemeal basis or $1.00 to $1.50 per day) and the inability to pay cash for supplies, turpentiners had to purchase on credit and thus became deeper in debt. Various taxes and penalties were also subtracted from wages, so that workers invariably found themselves indebted to their employers.

Wayne Flynt, a historian of the rural South, has described how debt peonage was backed by state laws and local law enforcement.[9] The state of Alabama had a law until the early 1930s that allowed plantation owners to have laborers arrested for failure to repay debts. If a worker was arrested, the state would lease the prisoner back to the owner for wages less than the worker was originally being paid. Laborers who tried to leave a plantation to which they were

indebted were treated as escaped criminals and hunted down, just as their slave ancestors had been pursued after escaping cotton plantations.

Turpentine Camps

> "How did you get into turpentining?" I asked a ragged, half-toothless old man in one of the surviving camps.
>
> "Sugar," he grinned back, "you is *born* into the teppentime. Ain't nothing you *go into*. Something you get *out of*."[10]

The wilderness is benign; however, in the case of turpentine workers, it provided the backdrop or context for oppression. Turpentine camps were located in isolated woodlands far removed from regular society. This remote environment facilitated a social and economic order based on exploitation and, in many cases, brutality. The early turpentine camps had a reputation for being hard, inbred places where there were few religious, educational, social, or recreational outlets save gambling or other illicit activity.

In the postbellum era and early twentieth century, workers were compelled to labor in the camps without any rights recognized by owners or camp bosses. The operators set the conditions and rules for camp life and any infractions were punished severely. Camp bosses and woods riders (a position analogous to an overseer) commonly whipped workers to keep order and instill fear and obedience. It was also not uncommon for laborers to be locked in their quarters after work to prevent them from leaving the camp. As indicated above, in cases where a worker escaped, he was hunted down by the turpentine owner or his agent and returned to camp with the justification that the worker owed the producer money for goods advanced. Early turpentine producers reasoned that they owned African Americans' labor and felt justified working him until injury or death.

Like white pioneers venturing into the western territories, turpentine workers around the turn of the twentieth century lived, literally, on southern frontiers; yet their experience seemed the inverse of that predicted by Frederick Jackson Turner. Turner argued that wilderness promoted democracy, while civilized society, by contrast, fertilized tyranny because the very process of civilization compelled one to conform.[11] Turner's "frontier thesis" is challenged by the experience of turpentine workers. The managers and the workers in some sense may have developed a rugged individualism from being in the wild; but instead of this evolving into a unique individualism and independence that challenged authoritarian rule, workers were subjugated by the worst kind of despotism.

The microsociety that supported turpentine operations was an extension

and intensification of the oppression existent in everyday southern society. After Martin Tabert, a young, white worker from a middle-class South Dakota family, was murdered by an infamous camp boss in 1921, the Florida legislature investigated turpentine camps throughout the South and surmised: "conditions—not limited to the single camp but existing throughout the turpentine belt . . . were revolting to the most hardened person."[12]

Tegeder has described typical conditions in the work camps: "Rural employers on remote plantations or isolated turpentine and railroad construction camps, for example, routinely regulated, prohibited, and punished African American behavior—however removed from the process of production—without assistance from the state. Local authorities simply considered African-American misbehavior, according to sociologist Arthur Raper, as 'a labor matter to be handled by the white landlord or his overseer.' With the approval of local law enforcement officials and white public opinion, southern employers could rule their workforce with a ruthlessness, even cruel, discipline that rivaled the legendary abuses of Simon Legree."[13]

Over time, many turpentine camps consisted of multiple generations of turpentine workers. People were born in the camps, grew up there, and when the males came of age, they learned how to harvest gum like their fathers before them. Children grew up with little opportunity for education because they lived so far from local schools, and also because the camps moved every few years.

Industry Decline

After World War II, the gum naval stores industry in the United States began to decline. This decline was precipitated by a number of factors, the most important of which was the lack of manpower.[14] Turpentining was very labor intensive, with labor accounting for more than 60 percent of production costs. The arduous nature of the work and the expanding economy and industrial development after the war lured many workers from the South to more amenable northern industries. This labor shortage made it increasingly difficult for turpentine farmers to operate, given foreign competitors who could produce at lower costs.

In a study of the turpentine industry's decline by Chiang, Burrows, Howard, and Woodard, the authors list several factors that contributed to the labor shortage. Among these are: an unflattering industry image, the paternalism of producers, low wage and job status, competition from other industries, poor living conditions in the turpentine camps, bad working conditions, employment instability, and poor employer-employee relations. Turpentine operators interviewed in that study also stressed that welfare programs lured

workers away from turpentine camps. The low salaries earned by workers qualified them for federal financial assistance programs that provided competitive incomes without the difficult working conditions.[15] Owners believed that these programs removed the incentive for turpentine work.

Due in large part to the rough terrain and difficulty in navigating dense forests, technological innovations did not replace the loss of human workers. The actual work of harvesting gum was virtually the same in 1940 as it had been in the antebellum era.[16] Declining production of turpentine continued through the 1960s and 1970s, and had virtually disappeared by the 1980s, except for a few remnant operations. The last remaining working crop in Georgia was harvested in 2001, but this last crop represented only a tiny fraction of pre–World War II output.

Turpentine in the African American Collective Memory

Turpentining has been held in the African American collective memory and passed down to successive generations orally. The principal means of this transference has come through folktale and song. Zora Neale Hurston's compelling documentation of turpentine workers' songs in the early Florida camps provides a vivid and "lived" account of the conditions that accompanied the work.[17] These recollections are not cemented in the academy but comprise an important part of African American folk tradition.

Though turpentine workers lived separately from other African Americans, knowledge of the harshness and meanness of their rustic existence was pervasive in the larger African American society. Not only turpentine laborers but other African Americans as well considered turpentining to be demeaning, and the latter sought to distance themselves from those who worked turpentine. Turpentiners were considered to be among the most uncouth and ignorant of African Americans. This attitude suggests a disdain for not only the workers but also the environment in which they labored, the woods. This viewpoint is consistent with Eldridge Cleaver's proclamation: "In terms of seeking status in America, blacks—principally the black bourgeoisie—have come to measure their own value according to the number of degrees they are away from the soil."[18]

Despite their hardships, turpentine workers exercised agency by developing an awareness and appreciation for the world in which they found themselves. Like other groups living close to nature, they aligned themselves with it. They learned to tell time by the sun's position, to forecast rain by watching insects congregate, and to "read" the signs and omens proffered by nature. The ambivalence these workers and their families exhibited towards the woods was

expressed by Ethylene Seastrunk, the wife of a turpentine worker in north Florida in the 1960s. She commented that she desperately wanted her sons to find work outside the turpentine camps. But she also says that it would be difficult for her to leave her wooded home because of her attachment to it: "Surely, surely, I think about livin' in the city sometimes. But, you know, I fraid I miss the woods too much. I love them old trees and the shade. And then, you can't hardly do no fishing in the city."[19]

Most of the early turpentine workers have died, and with them, firsthand accounts of life in the camps. Josh McDaniel located several turpentiners in south Alabama and talked to them about their lives working in the turpentine industry. These workers generally reference the turpentine camps of the post–World War II era, a time when camp conditions had improved, but the desire to leave the backwoods cabins and isolation remained.

Leander Showers is a retired turpentine worker. He was born in 1933 in Wallace, Alabama, and lived most of his life in turpentine camps throughout Alabama and Florida. He is named after the owner of the camp in which his father worked for most his life in McKinnonville, Florida. Showers started in turpentine when he was young: "My daddy started me off when I was five years old. I had a little ole syrup bucket and I'd be putting about two or three cups in there. They had the clay cups, the galvanized, and the aluminum. Sometimes it takes about three to fill my little bucket up, and I would carry it to the barrel." When Showers turned eighteen, he left the camp in McKinnonville and traveled from one camp to the next starting in north Florida and working his way down to central Florida over the course of fifteen years. He worked for different companies that leased land and continually moved turpentine camps further south as each lease ran out. He says that most of the abuses that have been written about in turpentine did not exist by the time he started working in the industry. It was hard work, and he didn't make much money, but he mainly has fond memories of the work and takes pride in his skill and knowledge of the woods. According to Showers, a good turpentine worker could look at a tree—the number of branches and cones, the lushness of the needles, and tell what quality and quantity of gum it would produce.

> You could tell how well a tree was going to run by looking at the canopy. If it was top-heavy you could count on more sap than one that hardly had any limbs on it—lots of needles—a good heavy straw. That meant it was going to be pulling a lot of sap and you was going to catch your share of it. When they had a heavy pinecone crop you could figure that there was going to be a light turpentine year. It was going to feed that pinecone, you know. I've seen good running trees with a big, heavy top and all. After I

tacked up a cup, I would throw down a couple underneath because I knew it would fill it up before I got back to collect it.

Turpentiners also developed complex understandings of the ecological properties and interaction of forests and climate, as evidenced by this comment from Showers: "As soon as the sap started running, we started streaking. Your turpentine runs when the sap goes up in a tree, when it comes down it quits running. I've seen these creeks be plum dry and sap start coming down and they would go back to running. That is moisture going back into the ground from them trees."

Showers learned to hunt and fish in the woods while he was working, and he would often bring back small game like rabbits and squirrels from a day in the woods. He knew the behavior of animals well and developed a respect for rattlesnakes: "You had to be careful because you had to be watching for them rattlers. If you change your route you are sure to run up on them. So if you are supposed to go up along there Wednesday, you better try to that same day. If you go another day earlier or a day late you going to meet him. But if you don't ever change your route you are all right."

In the 1960s, Showers moved back to McKinnonville where he had grown up. He wanted to settle down and raise a family. When his children were born he decided that he did not want them to be raised in a turpentine camp. He moved out of the camp in McKinnonville and purchased a house for his family nearby. Showers drove a truck into the camp everyday after that and joined the rest of the workers. He said that his children never worked a day in the woods. By the 1970s and 1980s, when Showers's sons were old enough to work, there were not many jobs left in the turpentine industry. Many of the former turpentiners were going into the timber business and working on shortwood logging crews. Like Seastrunk, Showers encouraged his children to get out of any work that would keep them in the forest. When asked why, he said: "There just ain't no money in it. The owners and the companies make all the money and the working man is stuck down at the bottom with nothing left over. It is a hard life, and I thought they could do better in something else. A lot of the people I knew who worked in turpentine went into the lumber business, but all of them are done now. There ain't no life in that neither." Both of Showers's sons now work in construction.[20]

In the 1940s and 1950s, as sharecropping and turpentine production were declining, some turpentiners shifted into pulpwooding—supplying wood to the mills that were beginning to dot the southern landscape. The pulp and paper industry developed a wood-supply system consistent with the social structure of the region. The relationship between the mill owners, wood dealers, producers, and workers typified the hierarchical social organization under slavery, sharecropping, and turpentine camps. Poor whites and African Americans did the work in the woods while landowners and merchants collected the profits. However, as the industry has moved toward highly mechanized, sophisticated wood-harvesting systems, employment opportunities dried up for those at the bottom of the job hierarchy. In a recent study of Alabama pulpwood producers, a woods worker and wood producer expressed it this way: "You can't find no wood now, you just can't find it. I can't. . . . They turned it to the big man, you see the big man got it all, see. These big haulers, these ones that got, the big companies are the ones that got it now. Boy, these trailer trucks, they haul everywhere, they go everywhere. They go for one hundred fifty miles, day and night too, I know some that does. So, the little man can't find no wood now, he can't do it. I can't."[21]

Poverty and unemployment are endemic in the rural counties of the South dominated by forest industries. Landownership and income from timber sales are concentrated in the hands of a few white owners, mirroring patterns established during the antebellum period. Relatively few African Americans have gained access to employment opportunities in the pulp and paper mills, and with the disappearance of shortwood logging and the increased mechanization of woods work, few are able to continue making a living in the forests. Migrant workers from Mexico and Central America, willing to work at reduced wages and under horrible working conditions, now supply the primary labor at the bottom of the work hierarchy. In many areas of the rural South, little has changed since the turpentine quarters were occupied by impoverished workers who provided labor for a vast industry with global connections.

"The thousand faces of the piney woods" as Zora Neale Hurston described the turpentine forests, elicit echoes of labor, suffering, and abuse. Scars remain in the trunks, built through years of "pulling streaks" to capture the once valuable resins as they rose and fell through the woody veins of the pines. Scars also remain in the communities consumed by turpentine. This remote industry once dominated the economy, and culturally it shaped the relationship between whites and African Americans and landowners and laborers in many parts of the South. That influence can be still be sensed in conversations with those who worked in the industry.

Turpentine evokes some of what has made southern society what it is today, and it is an essential part of the way in which the landscape has been transformed so completely and dramatically. In some ways, the story of turpentine tells of a time when people depended on their knowledge of the forest for sustenance, health, and livelihood. Such intimacy with trees and forests speaks to a period when seasons were measured by the rising and falling of

resins in stately pines, fire dominated the landscape, and the forests were filled with the songs of workers singing to the tallyman.

This romanticized description of the turpentine era, however, should be weighed against the larger reality of poverty and African American longing for that elusive, other, modernized and popularized America—the soda pop and hot dog world that Seastrunk's children found in town schools away from the camp.[22] Though the woods provided a livelihood and a knowledge base for turpentine workers and their families, this meager subsistence was not sufficient to keep most turpentiners in the woods. The hardships outweighed the benefits. Like other Americans, turpentiners longed for more for both themselves and their offspring.

After Jim Crow was abolished in the southern states by the 1960s, many African Americans fled the rural backcountry in search of the modern amenities available in the larger southern cities and in the North. The very idea of going back to the forest for recreation would be to abandon the African American quest for modernization. For as many years as African Americans have been in North America, they have striven to debunk negative stereotypes and categorizations of themselves as primal, natural, simple, and uncivilized. If African Americans are to return to the woods en masse as nature enthusiasts, they must first reconcile with the past and then move forward to reclaim and reacquaint themselves with the forests and woodlands in which their forebears both learned and survived.

6

African Americans, Outdoor Recreation, and the 1919 Chicago Race Riot

COLIN FISHER

Since the late 1960s, practitioners in the field of environmental history have labored to make nature a critical category of historical analysis, and over the past three decades, their insights have altered the ways in which historians, environmentalists, and even the larger public understand the relationship between nature and culture. But in exploring this relationship, environmental historians have often downplayed differences within human cultures, especially along lines of race, class, and gender. As historian Alan Taylor points out, when it comes to human history, environmental historians tend to "lump" rather than "split."[1]

More recently, though, the field is paying far more attention to divisions within human societies. Motivated in part by the environmental justice movement, many environmental historians are examining the inequitable distribution of scarce natural resources, such as water, and the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards, such as pollution and "natural" disasters, on disadvantaged people.

One subject largely untouched by environmental historians who "split" is disadvantaged Americans' use of nature for leisure. It is commonly assumed that people of color and working-class European Americans were simply too preoccupied struggling for the necessities of life to concern themselves with a "luxury" such as leisure in nature or in the wilderness. Only those who had satisfied basic needs—middle- and upper-class European Americans—made the retreat back to nature.[2]