

Environmental and Labor History: Family Resemblances

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Abstract: This article introduces the contributions to the special dossier on environmental and labor history. It traces the relationship between the fields of labor and environmental history, both historically and thematically. And it places the dossier's contributions within this broader historiographical context, placing them in an evolving dialogue at the borderland between fields that stretches back several decades. This generative conversation has included some scholars considered founding members of environmental history.

Keywords: Labor history; environmental history; class; nature.

LABOR AND ENVIRONMENTAL history occupy distinct intellectual spaces in the discipline and attend to discrete debates in patterns that have unfolded over the decades. During environmental history's emergence in the 1970s and incremental consolidation in the 1980s, labor history was already experiencing a second wave of institutionalization. To highlight one simple measure of a field's coherence, an initial flock of labor history journals emerged in the North Atlantic in the late 1950s, as the field acquired a discernible shape within the broader category of social history. Then another wave came in the mid-1970s, represented by journals such as *International Labor and Working-Class History*. That was also when *Environmental Review*, the predecessor to *Environmental History*, began publication.¹ Outside of Europe

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1 FIELD, Geoffrey; HANAGAN, Michael. ILWCH: forty years on. **International Labor and Working-Class History**, v. 82, p. 5-14, 2012. p. 5. KIRK, Neville. Taking stock: labor history during the past fifty years. **International Labor and Working-Class History**, v. 82, p. 156-173, 2013.

and the United States, the founding of journals, with attendant organizations and conferences, followed a somewhat later timeline but one that still reflected labor history's precedence and environmental history's later development. Brazil offers a clear example. The leaders of the Working Group on the Worlds of Labor, established in Brazil in 1999, characterized it as a "return" to labor history.² There is no dedicated environmental history journal in Brazil, though the regionally-focused *Halac – Historia Ambiental Latinoamericana y Caribeña* was founded in 2010.³

Environmental history's lag behind labor history was not owed purely to the mechanics of professional societies and publications. Environmental historians have found it harder to thrust the core questions of their field into the center of the discipline's debates. In Latin America, the field also had to deal with the burdening legacy of early 20th-century geographic determinism.⁴ As late as 2003, Ellen Stroud suggested that decades of pathbreaking scholarship had not saved the field from remaining "largely marginal to the discipline as a whole." She made a renewed pitch for centrality, suggesting that the "significance and broader relevance" of environmental history rest in "materiality: we pay attention to dirt, and others should too".⁵ That pitch for the field reveals how labor and environmental history's impulses intertwine. Labor historians may or may not pay attention to dirt, but they certainly care about materiality. John Soluri has argued that insistent attention to the materiality of production and consumption helps undermine the tendency to naturalize labor markets and commodities. This strength of environmental history can make it especially powerful in combination with labor historical approaches.⁶ The two fields' shared concern with the material points to longstanding resonances between them.

Environmental history's very marginality helps explain its overlap with labor history. Despite the efforts of early innovators, widespread graduate training in environmental history is barely more than a generation old; it is even younger in many parts of the world. Many people who evolved into environmental historians honed their craft by doing it. Their work often bore the marks of their earlier intellectual trajectories. This was emphatically the case with a couple of North American historians with roots in labor history who wrote foundational studies of Brazilian environmental history: Warren Dean and Barbara Weinstein. Dean's *With Broadax and Firebrand* and Weinstein's *The Amazon Rubber Boom* opened debates in Brazil(ianist) historiography on environmental change while paying attention to class dynamics and structural inequalities.⁷ Dean's book appears as the first footnote in Dutra e

2 **Revista Mundos do Trabalho**, "Working Group 'Worlds of Labor'". <https://mundosdotrabalho.com.br/en/working-group-worlds-of-labor>.

3 **História Ambiental Latinoamericana y Caribeña**. <https://www.halacsolcha.org/index.php/halac>.

4 SEDREZ, Lise. História ambiental da América Latina: costurando tradição e inovação. In: MAIA, Andréa Casa Nova; MORAES, Marieta de (ed.). **Outras histórias**: ensaios em História Social. Belo Horizonte: Ponteio, 2012.

5 STROUD, Ellen. Does nature always matter? Following dirt through history. **History and Theory**, v. 42, n. 4, p. 75-81, 2003.

6 SOLURI, John. Labor, rematerialized: putting environments to work in the Americas. **International Labor and Working-Class History**, v. 85, p. 162-176, p.173, 2014.

7 DEAN, Warren. **A ferro e a fogo**: a história e a destruição da Mata Atlântica brasileira. São Paulo: Companhia

Silva's article in this collection, not coincidentally; that is a familiar location for a masterpiece now three decades old. The book has also inspired brilliant responses and rejoinders, including Diogo Carvalho Cabral's *Na presença da floresta*.⁸

Given the labor historical roots of much environmental history, many stalwarts of the earlier generations relied on Marxian perspectives as they opened up the field. We could note in particular the outsized contributions of William Cronon, Donald Worster, and Richard White.⁹ In emphasizing the importance of the environment, they also questioned Marxist tenets. As Gunther Peck observes, Worster and Cronon disagreed about much but agreed that nature created wealth, a challenge to the labor theory of value.¹⁰ These historians also called explicitly for a dialogue between labor and environmental history, including gesturing toward common ground in a 1990 *Journal of American History* forum debating Worster's article "Transformations of the Earth."¹¹ Richard White (also represented in that forum) conceptualized the shared materiality of the environment and labor by extending the concept of work to natural organisms, processes, and formations. His argument that focusing on the exertion of energy offers a fundamental bridge between studies of people and studies of nature was one of the premises of his pioneering book on the Columbia River, *The Organic Machine*.¹²

Links between the two fields extend further than their shared attention to materiality. In a broad review of labor-oriented environmental history and environmentally-oriented labor history on Latin America, Aviva Chomsky emphasizes that both fields "are in some senses investigations of how humans relate to nature." She also notes that sites of labor and the environment are both susceptible to multi-scalar analysis, as "spheres in which individual and local experiences are tied to global and transnational systems." This offers helpful routes to new interpretations of capitalism, empire, and climate change, among other big themes.¹³ In their respective ways, the two fields have attended carefully to the growth and impacts of markets. Finally, the various attacks suffered by nature and the working class over time have often been inflicted simultaneously. The plight of small farmers, or the struggles of extractive workers and traditional forest dwellers, as José Augusto Padua and Alessandra Carvalho noted in a recent review, are recurring themes among Brazilian environmental historians.¹⁴

das Letras, 1998. WEINSTEIN, Barbara. *A borracha na Amazônia: expansão e decadência, 1850-1920*. São Paulo: Hucitec; USP, 1993.

8 CABRAL, Diogo Carvalho. *Na presença da floresta: Mata Atlântica e história colonial*. Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 2014.

9 ANDREWS, Thomas. Work, nature, and history: a single question, that once moved like light. In: ISENBERG, Andrew (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. p. 428.

10 PECK, Gunther. The nature of labor: fault lines and common ground in environmental and labor history. *Environmental History*, v. 11, 2006, p. 212-238, p. 217.

11 WORSTER, Donald. Transformations of the earth: toward an agroecological perspective in history. *Journal of American History*, v. 76, n. 4, p. 1087-1106, 1990. CRONON, William. Modes of prophecy and production: placing nature in history. *Journal of American History*, v. 76, n. 4, p. 1122-1131, 1990.

12 WHITE, Richard. Environmental history, ecology, and meaning. *Journal of American History*, v. 76, n. 4, p. 1111-1116, 1990. WHITE, Richard. *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1995.

13 CHOMSKY, Aviva. Labor and the environment in Latin America. *Oxford Research Encyclopedias: Latin American History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. p. 2-3.

14 PÁDUA, José Augusto; CARVALHO, Alessandra Izabel de. A construção de um país tropical: uma apresentação

The unfolding of history itself, we could say, demonstrates the need for a shared labor and environmental approach.

Given this established track record, bringing labor and environmental history into dialogue is far from new. Thomas Andrews goes so far as to suggest that “a tangle of submerged ideologies link labor and environmental history into a larger whole.”¹⁵ We may in fact see much of the fields’ intertwining as a function of the latter’s emergence and growth. Along the way, a handful of scholars have taken the time to assess the fields’ interactions, reverberations, overlaps, and dialogues. No individual scholar has done more in this realm than John McNeill with his careful, regular assessments of the field of environmental history.¹⁶ But Gunther Peck, Thomas Andrews, Thomas Klubock, Kate Brown, and Aviva Chomsky (in the already-cited article) have contributed insightful reviews of work, highlighting current questions and those in need of inquiry. The present issue of this journal fits into this evolving dialogue at the borderland between fields, confirming some patterns and opening new paths for us to follow.

A handful of helpful conceptual tools have emerged across the two decades of activity at this borderland. Gunther Peck, another labor historian drawn toward environmental analysis, proposes the framework of “geographies of labor” to help theorize the fields’ shared concern with materiality. He borrows the phrase from White’s classic *The Organic Machine* but also leans on David Harvey. The geographer’s perspective allows Peck to point out that geographies allow for the simultaneous investigation of environments and the human relations that constitute places.¹⁷ The approach bears a strong resemblance to landscape, which some of us have theorized (in Thomas Rogers’ research, through the concept of “work landscapes”), as well as to Andrews’s concept of “workscapes”.¹⁸ Andrews develops this idea in his book *Killing for Coal* but offers a pithy definition in his chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental History*, where he suggests that these sites “stand at the intersection of internally differentiated human societies ordered by complicated, unequal relations of power and a still more diverse and differentiated natural world.” This makes them promising “places, systems, and assemblages” for gaining new purchase on the past.¹⁹

A thematic issue of *International Labor and Working-Class History* in 2014 showcased a lengthy roster of historians approaching sites around the globe from environmental and

da historiografia ambiental sobre o Brasil. **História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos**, v. 27, n. 4, p. 1311-1340, 2020.

15 ANDREWS, op. cit., p. 425.

16 See in particular: McNEILL, J. R. Observations on the nature and culture of environmental history. **History and Theory**, v. 42, p. 5-43, 2003. McNEILL, J. R. The state of the field of environmental history. **Annual Review of Environment and Resources**, v. 35, p. 345-374, 2010.

17 PECK, op. cit., p. 212-238. “Common Ground” is a common phrase in this genre. See: MOSLEY, Stephen. Common ground: integrating social and environmental history. **Journal of Social History**, v. 39, n. 3, p. 915-933, 2006. E, claro, a coletânea clássica de Cronon: CRONON, William (ed.). **Uncommon Ground**: Toward Reinventing Nature. New York: Norton, 1995.

18 ROGERS, Thomas D. **The Deepest Wounds**: A Labor and Environmental History of Sugar in Northeast Brazil. University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

19 ANDREWS, Thomas. **Killing for Coal**: America’s Deadliest Labor War. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008. ANDREWS, op. cit., p. 428.

labor perspectives. In addition to noting some of the patterns we have already discussed, issue editors Brown and Klubock point to studies of working-class environmentalism. Bringing environmental history to bear on labor history, they argue, “facilitates a spatial analysis of class formation.” This approach allows historians to situate and appreciate “workers on the move, workers who travel, migrate, and occupy multiple — at times liminal — places in nature, cities, industries, and agriculture”.²⁰ The present issue of *Mundos do Trabalho* includes several groups of these “workers on the move,” as well as workers in a variety of other contexts.

The Dossier: Intentions, Introductions, Contributions

FOR ALL THE ACTION at the intersection of labor and environmental history tracked and encouraged by scholars like Peck, Andrews, Klubock, and Chomsky, they have not become routine in our discipline. We continue to have excellent contributions from researchers like John Soluri. His *Banana Cultures* broke important ground by blending labor, environmental, and commodity chain analysis and his recent book, *Creatures of Fashion*, again places commodity flows at the center of analysis while simultaneously paying close attention to labor relations and environmental change.²¹ And yet, Stroud’s comment twenty years ago about environmental history’s marginality remains surprisingly current, and the field’s alliance with labor history is unknown to many.²² More specifically, certain approaches to that alliance have been more common than others. Jonathan Franklin observed almost a decade and a half ago that “both labor and environmental historians have had some success integrating cultural and political environmental issues into labor-centered narratives, but the task has proven more challenging in regard to material environmental issues.”²³ By and large, this remains the case.

When we solicited contributions to this dossier, we considered both the richness of the past generation of work and the space left to be explored. We did not expect to get a representative cross-section of all possible themes and tendencies in the border realm between labor and environmental history. We wanted interesting, provocative studies that might help reveal some of the fertility of that domain, and that is what we got. The patterns of responses, however, were not necessarily predictable.

For a group of essays that focuses largely on Brazil, for instance, we were surprised to see a lack of representation of the country’s southeast. Generally, so much attention goes to

20 BROWN, Kate; KLUBOCK, Thomas. Environment and labor: introduction. **International Labor and Working-Class History**, v. 85, p. 4-9, p. 9, 2014.

21 SOLURI, John. **Banana Cultures**: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005. SOLURI, John. **Creatures of Fashion**: Animals, Global Markets, and the Transformation of Patagonia. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2024.

22 STROUD, op. cit., p. 75.

23 FRANKLIN, Jonathan S. Working-class themes in the new environmental history. **Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas**, v. 9, n. 1, p. 119-131, p. 120, 2012.

Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and perhaps Belo Horizonte. Two articles about Amazonia perhaps should have been expected, given popular assumptions about Brazil's "environment." But we also have two articles on the northeastern sugarcane region and one on the center-west of the country. Similarly, we thought we might see more about urban labor, women's labor and gender analysis more broadly, perhaps more on non-human animals. None of these articles is explicitly oriented around environmental justice, the central thrust of which aligns more often with environmental history produced in Latin America as opposed to the United States.²⁴ This particular collection also makes no overt reference to two concepts that have attracted a great deal of attention recently: the Anthropocene and the great acceleration.²⁵ These are themes for another issue.

The excellent articles in this issue intersect in instructive ways. Pablo Corral-Broto, on the one hand, and Samuel Carvalheira de Maupeou and Altemar da Costa Muniz on the other describe the laborers at the center of their respective articles as competent political actors in their own right who advocated for themselves and navigated environmental issues. They may have come from organized labor in Spain, in Corral-Broto's article, or the sugarcane region of Pernambuco, in Maupeou and Costa Muniz's, but the groups shared a clear agency. Marlos de Matos and Lara de Castro Ferreira and Sandro Dutra e Silva, however, describe workers as objects of analysis, situated by those operating from above. Here, Matos and Castro Ferreira investigate workers for mining operations in the Amazon and Dutra e Silva characterizes the role of *mateiros* on the frontiers of northern and central Brazil.

The workers that Wesley Oliveira Kettle describes supporting a border-mapping expedition dispatched by the Portuguese Crown in the 18th century are the direct counterparts to the *mateiros* analyzed by Dutra e Silva. But unlike in the 20th century, their work in the 18th century Amazon was largely erased or elided, put in the shadow of the intellectual labors carried out by the "intelligent commissioners" of the scientific expedition he describes. Christine Rufino Dabat, finally, describes workers in Pernambuco's Zona da Mata whose practices of gardening open new interpretive opportunities to think about the role of subsistence in wage labor relations, potentially the keys to the so-called peasant breach. In several of these articles, working-class representatives and activists advocate either for environmental protection or against the type of environmental despoliation that risked their own health and livelihoods. This is what Chad Montrie has called "expedient environmentalism" in his account of unions and opposition to coal surface mining and what Juan Martínez Alier has called the "environmentalism of the poor".²⁶

24 RECTOR, Josiah. The spirit of Black Lake: full employment, civil rights, and the forgotten early history of environmental justice. **Modern American History**, v. 1, n. 1, p. 45-66, 2018. SEDREZ, op. cit.

25 STEFFEN, Will et al. The trajectory of the Anthropocene: the Great Acceleration. **The Anthropocene Review**, v. 2, n. 1, p. 81-98, 2015. McNEILL, J. R.; ENGELKE, Peter. **The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945**. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.

26 MONTRIE, Chad. Expedient environmentalism: opposition to coal surface mining in Appalachia and the United Mine Workers of America, 1945-1975. **Environmental History**, v. 5, n. 1, p. 75-98, 2000. MARTÍNEZ ALIER, Joan. **O ecologismo dos pobres**: a luta ambiental e a justiça social. São Paulo: Editora Unesp, 2007. Ver

The dossier begins with Wesley Oliveira Kettle's account of 18th century territorial boundary marking and scientific exploration in the Amazon region. As he points out, opening the environmental dimension of the boundary-marking expedition enriches how we interpret and situate this important historical episode. He uses as his main sources the reports of the expedition's leader and two of its primary scientists. The concrete details of the trip are formidable: more than 1,000 people traversed thousands of kilometers of river, half of them indigenous workers who piloted the large canoes that carried the participants and their gear. They also had astronomers, surgeons, artists, engineers, and doctors among their "intelligent commissioners." Oliveira Kettle suggests that the expedition leaders' very apprehension of the nature of the Amazon was shaped by their indigenous workers. He begins the article with the lists of supplies that the expedition required at the outset. The first includes exotic scientific instruments for the commissioners. But it was the more prosaic list of food and tools that kept the scientists alive.

In this blend of intellectual, labor, and environmental history, Oliveira Kettle describes labor in the natural world that was both physical and intellectual. He foregrounds the workers Brown and Klubock highlight as "occupy[ing] often invisible or difficult to pinpoint places in the interstices of labor's geography."²⁷ Their knowledge of foodways and rainforest hazards, of boating technologies and Amazonian travel made essential contributions to the expedition as a whole. The argument returns us to Richard White's dictum that people mostly know the environment through labor.²⁸ Oliveira Kettle also takes into account the intellectual labor of the scientists, who sought "a way of understanding the limits of human action and its capacity to overcome them." "Colonial borders," he argues, "were not only physically demarcated, but also reconfigured through environmental and sociocultural interactions."

Staying in the Amazonian region, Marlos de Matos and Lara de Castro Ferreira describe the exploitation of a manganese deposit in the state of Amapá as part of a concerted, modernizing, developmentalist project guided by Getúlio Vargas's nationalist regime. Vargas sought to "conquer and dominate the valleys of the great equatorial rivers, transforming their blind force and extraordinary fertility into disciplined energy." This too recalls Richard White and his documentation of the language and logic of the state-driven harnessing of hydropower in the U.S.²⁹ Matos and Castro Ferreira open their article with a vignette about a disastrous visit to the mine made by President Kubitschek and the press

também: DEWEY, Scott. Working for the environment: organized labor and the origins of environmentalism in the United States, 1948-1970. **Environmental History**, v. 3, n. 1, p. 45-63, 1998. VELUT, Jean-Baptiste. A brief history of the relations between the US labor and environmental movements (1965-2010). **Revue française d'études américaines**, n. 129, v. 3, p. 59-72, 2011. OBACH, Brian K. **Labor and the Environmental Movement: The Quest for Common Ground**. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004. SILVERMAN, Victor. Sustainable alliances: the origins of international labor environmentalism. **International Labor and Working-Class History**, v. 66, p. 118-135, 2004. JAKOPOVICH, Dan. Uniting to win: labor-environmental alliances. **Capitalism Nature Socialism**, v. 20, n. 2, p. 74-96, 2009.

27 BROWN; KLUBOCK, op. cit., p. 9.

28 WHITE, op. cit., x, p. 9.

29 Ibidem.

corps. The group endured a ride through the forest on cramped rail cars, an accident on the way back, and then a harrowing slog to town through pelting rain. The episode highlighted the particular challenges of industrializing this region of the country, and the vulnerabilities of the people who actually worked for Icomi, the Minas Gerais-based mine operator. Plumbing the early years of the company's decades-long stay, the article emphasizes that place matters — workers in the late 1940s and early 1950s faced problems specific to the mine's Amazonian location.

Matos and Castro Ferreira start with the presumption that work accidents and illnesses are social problems generated in the context of the social relations of the work space. The article details the years of construction required to build the mine's infrastructure—two "company towns" and a 200-kilometer railroad. The accidents workers suffered on the job, including snake and scorpion bites, were caused, the authors argue, by the social conditions to which they were subjected, including the company's authoritarianism. Northeastern workers were seen as "naturally" the most fit to tame the wild Amazonian forest. The mining company, for its part, attempted to "create a specific type of worker and family equipped with values based on the assignment of roles and duties according to gender and a new capitalist-industrial work ethic." As Matos and Castro Ferreira note, the worker went "face to face with a world of work exponentially different from the usual."

Matos and Castro Ferreira's contribution makes sense in the context of a long-term approximation that the history of science and the history of medicine have made toward environmental history. The authors cite José Sérgio Leite Lopes and his classic ethnography about sugar mill workers in Pernambuco, for instance. Leite Lopes noted the long-term enervating effects of the extremely demanding mill work. A more recent echo of that intellectual legacy comes from José Marcelo Marques Ferreira, who has examined the health consequences of sugarcane field labor in the same region.³⁰ The journal *Manguinhos*, for instance, published by the Fundação Osvaldo Cruz, has printed many articles that might be read as environmental history and promising work is on the way from younger scholars such as Sophie Williams.³¹

The single non-Brazil-centered article in the dossier focuses on industrial workers in the Spanish region of Aragon. Pablo Corral-Broto offers an account of working-class mobilization around environmental issues. A series of working-class organizations took part in the activism, mostly working clandestinely and in opposition to the state and some of them associated with the Socialist or Communist Parties. These workers expressed their frustration with straightforward environmental issues, including pollution and the damage

30 LEITE LOPES, José Sérgio. *O vapor do diabo: o trabalho dos operários do açúcar*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz & Terra, 1978. FERREIRA FILHO, José Marcelo Marques. *Corpos exauridos: relações de poder, trabalho e doenças nas plantações açucareiras (Zona da Mata de Pernambuco, 1963-1973)*. 2012. MA Thesis in History, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, 2012.

31 RATHZEL, Nora; STEVIS, Dimitris; UZZELL, David (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Environmental Labor Studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

created by major nuclear and hydroelectrical energy projects. The latter issue is somewhat surprising because of the associations between these infrastructural projects and industrial development. That somewhat surprising outcome, of perhaps advocating against one's material interests, nonetheless showed the importance of environmental issues to the working class.

Corral-Broto makes the fascinating argument that environmentalist protest became a conduit for expressing anti-Franco sentiment. Protestors adopted the logic of anti-colonialism (including internal colonialism) and the discourse of liberation theology, among others. Corral-Broto actually chose Aragon as a case study because the regional archives offer greater access to records from the authoritarian period. He also made the scalar rationale that Aragon offered an opportunity to look at working-class environmental struggles from the local to the regional levels. Fewer conflicts and demonstrations erupted at a national-level scale in Spain. The activists opposed the overall scheme of industrialization that had unfolded under the Franco regime, though they stepped up their efforts after the dictator's death in 1975.

Corral-Broto's theme resonates with work stretching back at least three decades. As early as 1993, Robert Gottlieb challenged the received idea that labor and environmental movements were opposed.³² The nexus between labor and environmental movements, indeed, have helped fuel both historical subfields represented in this dossier. The commitment of environmental history to the environmental movement is mirrored by the longer-term relationship between labor historians and the labor movement. These commitments, as various people have pointed out, appeared to intertwine during the early-2000s activism in opposition to the World Trade Organization. The material concerns of these movements, and their sense that new trade agreements (most emblematically perhaps, NAFTA) were ignoring the vulnerabilities of workers and environments, brought activists to the streets.³³ Corral-Broto's Aragon case study might also point toward a particular resonance between labor activism and energy projects. This article recalls Myrna Santiago's description of class-inflected environmental opposition to the wide-ranging impacts of oil production in Veracruz, for instance.³⁴ But also Jacquelyn Southern's research on working-class opposition to nuclear power and Chomsky and Striffler's study of environmentalism among coal miners.³⁵

32 GOTTLIEB, Robert. **Forcing the Spring**: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993. Franklin points this out: FRANKLIN, op. cit., p. 120.

33 GORDON, Robert W. "Environmental Blues: Working-Class Environmentalism and the Labor-Environment Alliance, 1968-1985". 2004. PhD Dissertation in History, Wayne State University, 2004. LIPIN, Lawrence. **Workers and the Wild**: Conservation, Consumerism, and Labor in Oregon, 1910-1930. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.

34 SANTIAGO, Myrna I. **Ecology of Oil**: Environment, Labor, and the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1938. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

35 SOUTHERN, Jacquelyn. Changing nature: union discourse and the Fermi Atomic Power Plant. **International Labor and Working-Class History**, v. 85, p. 33-58, 2014. CHOMSKY, Aviva; STRIFFLER, Steve. Empire, labor, and environment: coal mining and anticapitalist environmentalism in the Americas. **International Labor and Working-Class History**, v. 85, p. 194-200, 2014.

As fertile as the subfield of working-class environmentalism has been, we would benefit from an intellectual history of labor activists' environmental thought. It is tempting to be reductive in imputing certain straightforward environmental ideas to members of the working class and their mouthpieces. Fighting for the preservation of their own living and working environments sometimes seems a project that does not require and did not include theorization. But we have plenty of examples of the intellectual sophistication and disciplined intellectual practices of labor leaders. To take a recent example, Brazil's President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva reportedly read two books a month in prison.³⁶ Chico Mendes was educated by a communist activist who demanded from him a rigorous reading regimen.³⁷

Samuel Carvalheira de Maupeou and Altemar da Costa Muniz's article address an instance when the interests of workers and environmental protection were put into conflict with one another. They write about a group of landless workers who had historically been employed by a company that owned a group of *engenhos* (sugar plantations, or parts of sugar plantations) in the northeastern state of Pernambuco. In the late 1980s, the workers sought the expropriation of their home sites from the company that owned them, which had long been in decline. Many in the urban area of Recife, close to the lands in question, were sympathetic with the rural workers' pursuit of land, but they balked at these poor families occupying rare scraps of the ecologically rich Atlantic Forest. Occupations of the lands began in February 1986 and extended for almost three years, when hundreds of families were settled on the plantations. As soon as the land question appeared settled, the environmental question surged to the fore. Between 1989 and 1993, negotiations erupted to protect the forest, culminating in a legal agreement for its sustainable use.

The article offers invaluable insight into the sometimes-fraught alliances between labor and environmental advocates. When they align, they can sometimes confirm political alliances of long standing. After all, it was the sight of environmentalists and workers' advocates marching shoulder to shoulder to oppose unfettered trade and the marginalization of environmental or labor accords in World Trade Organization negotiations that inspired Peck, in part, to pen his article on "The Nature of Labor." But alignment does not always take place. Maupeou and Costa Muniz's story shows us an instructive case of a mismatch between competing land-oriented commitments: to reform of ownership patterns and to preservation.

Christine Rufino Dabat's article also focuses on the sugarcane region of Pernambuco. She offers perhaps the most explicit methodological or theoretical call to action, pointing to the utility of environmental history as a framework to open new dimensions of the study of rural wage-laborers. Sugarcane workers' reliance on, and alienation from, garden plots serves as crucial area for exploration to grasp the boundaries of their lived experience, their capacities for survival, and their resources for leverage with their bosses. Dabat encourages

36 CINTRA, André. "Os livros que Lula leu durante seus 580 dias na prisão". <https://vermelho.org.br/2020/01/16/os-livros-que-lula-leu-durante-seus-580-dias-na-prisao/>.

37 RODRIGUES, Gomercindo. **Caminhando na floresta**. Rio Branco: Edufac, 2009.

historians to take the productive relations of a particular place and time on its own terms, resisting the powerful draw toward assumptions that she critiques as Eurocentric. Rather than automatically associating both agriculture and especially household garden production as backward, for instance, she suggests looking at both realms through a more open lens and even seeing them as symbols of resistance. Gardening can be conceived of as an interesting social and material lever and a key part of the so-called peasant breach—a mechanism for survival and a subtle tool for resisting the full control of bosses. She clarifies that she is not focusing on subsistence agriculture, but the household production that fit prominently into the routines of some rural wage-earners (and perhaps some small number of urban ones too). She also suggests that the gardens themselves can be subjected to environmental analysis and she raises the possibility that the peasant breach opens in part through a fundamentally environmental mechanism.

Dabat's suggestions align with Steven Stoll's straightforward observation that subsistence production did not disappear with capitalism and the imposition of wage labor. Dabat's reflections on sugarcane workers make a productive counterpoint to the coal miners Stoll describes. The gardens and their subsistence and even surplus production can, in both cases, be seen from multiple angles. We can see them as "captured gardens," in Stoll's words, facilitating the superexploitation of workers by mine owners. And we can see them as the portals to a form of worker autonomy, as Dabat points out. Klubock and Brown observe that however much workers embraced gardens' promise of autonomy, they also underwrote social reproduction. The important argument Dabat makes is that no matter their approach to gardens, historians ought to reckon with the materiality of the gardens and with workers' engagement with their environments.³⁸

Finally, Sandro Dutra e Silva offers a nuanced portrait of woodsmen operating at the frontier in central and northern Brazil during the first half of the 20th century. He details not just the material labor of these people, but the tropes that emerged about that work and its importance. As we noted above, this subject matter puts Dutra e Silva in the familiar terrain of Warren Dean, the most familiar narrator of Brazil's Atlantic Forest, and particularly the colossal assaults it endured. But as Dutra e Silva notes, forests are one of the foundational themes of Brazilian environmental history, with a range of contributions.³⁹ Despite the comparatively generous attention paid to deforestation, little has gone to those actually working in the forests, including cutting them down. Like Oliveira Kettle, Dutra e Silva points toward the intellectual labor of these woodsmen, but for his article he focuses on their role extending the colonizing frontier. This examination of the exploration, manipulation, and destruction of "Brazil's forested landscapes" focuses on the *cerrado* and Amazônia.

38 STOLL, Steven. The captured garden: the political ecology of subsistence under capitalism. *International Labor and Working-Class History*, v. 85, p. 75-96, 2014. BROWN, op. cit., p. 8.

39 Consult Dutra e Silva's footnotes, but we will mention here PÁDUA, José Augusto. *Um sopro de destruição: pensamento político e crítica ambiental no Brasil escravista, 1786-1888*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2002.

Drawing heavily on newspaper sources from the early decades of the 20th century, Dutra e Silva reveals the multiple faces of the *mateiro*. Journalists linked the figure to earlier colonial figures (like the *bandeirante*), to the *sertanejo*, and to the Amazonian colonizer. The *mateiro*'s work went beyond the seasonal use of fire and saw to cut forests, and newspapers included a wide range of the intellectual and physical labor of these workers. Journalists described them as explorers, trail cutters, experts on the human and non-human residents of the forests, and more. In central Brazil, *mateiros* played a key role in expanding the coffee frontier. The crop had become Brazil's signature commodity, which meant that its expansion carried significant economic and cultural weight.

In all, this dossier connects environmental historians to labor history, as we believe the dynamics of nature and labor, human and non-human, are intertwined. The possibilities of this connection are multifold. By incorporating nature within its realm, labor history can only broaden its reach and fulfill this promise. We are pleased to see the contributions herein taking their respective steps in this direction.

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