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The 50th Year: Special Essay 5

Peter A. Coclanis

Field Notes: Agricultural History's New Plot

Agricultural history has come a long way in recent decades, bearing little resemblance to the field at the time when *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* published its first issue in 1970. Moreover, after decades of decline, this venerable field has become hot and trendy, attracting many young scholars not only in history but also in a variety of related disciplines. The study of agriculture, perceived by many to be old-fashioned, even a bit anachronistic in the 1970s and 1980s, has actually been transformed intellectually and demographically over the past twenty-five or thirty years; a new generation of "aggies" and newcomers from emerging domains of history have re-envisioned and rejuvenated the field.

To foreground the argument herein, the rise of cognate fields such as environmental history and food history in the 1980s had much to offer increasingly beleaguered agricultural historians, as did the advent of new approaches and subfields in economic history (historical anthropometrics) and in allied areas (bioarcheology and auxology). By and large, agricultural historians' perception of these developments as new opportunities to be embraced helped to facilitate a process that would ultimately prove instrumental in recasting and thus reinvigorating the field intellectually—introducing it to new theories and methods, as well as to what might be called new points of emphasis. As both a cause and an effect of the re-invigoration process, the field's demographics shifted as well, as younger and more diverse scholars, pleased by the warm reception that they received, entered agricultural history from these cognate fields. Eventually, agricultural history began to transform, though

Peter A. Coclanis is Albert Ray Newsome Distinguished Professor of History and Director, Global Research Institute, University of North Carolina. He is the author of *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Globalization in Southeast Asia Over La Longue Durée* (Singapore, 2006); *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670–1920* (New York, 1989).

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slowly and fitfully; the changes, which were profound, first had to be recognized, legitimized, and valorized by "market makers" in the field— by influential editors, professional organizations, educational institutions, funding agencies, and senior academics. To demonstrate this process, the focus in this article is mainly on U.S. agricultural history, particularly the agricultural history of the U.S. South. Much the same transformation occurred, however, in agricultural history elsewhere in the United States, in Europe, in Asia, etc. Specialists all over the world responded to the same stimuli, albeit sometimes after a lag.

Nor did the change in agricultural history occur in a vacuum. The development of both the cognate fields and the new approaches that were to prove instrumental to it found inspiration, encouragement, and support from a variety of institutions, centers, and publication venues, including *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. Although the *JIH* was hardly the progenitor of the new agricultural history, it certainly proved adept at the art and science of intellectual midwifery.

THE BIRTH OF AGRICULTURAL HISTORY IN THE *JIH* If agricultural history *qua* field and agricultural historians *qua* scholars, around the early 1990s, could both still be characterized as traditional, even a tad stodgy, neither was reactionary. In terms of receptivity to new ideas, both were certainly well within two standard deviations of the scholarly mean for the time. The same is true of the principal contemporary journals, most notably, *Agricultural History*, the standard bearer in the field. Few journals are ever truly "cutting edge." Yet, in this regard, the *JIH* stands out as a major exception. To be sure, this journal, which has always been accurately associated with innovation and the embrace of new methods and approaches, was, in the early 1990s, still in the early stages of incorporating the emerging fields and subfields mentioned above into its scholarly portfolio. Even so, by that time, it had already played an outsized role in their development. A brief look at the *JIH*'s thematic coverage since it began publication in 1970 will illustrate this point.[1]

1 At this time, the *Agricultural History Review*, the organ of the British Agricultural History Society, like other leading agricultural-history journals, resembled its older American counterpart, *Agricultural History*, which began publication in 1927 under the auspices of the Agricultural History Society, founded in Washington, D.C., eight years earlier.

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Classification is seldom as easy as it seems at first blush and is almost always arbitrary at the margins. These points are particularly relevant when we want to place objects of concern—in this case, material published in the *JIH*—in one bucket and one bucket only. Many scholarly articles address multiple themes, at least to some degree; focusing on just one of them risks the loss of texture and nuance. For the purposes of this exercise, however, some texture and nuance can be sacrificed to highlight broad trends regarding coverage of agricultural history, and its cognates—environmental history, food history, and historical anthropometrics.

Given these considerations, what do we find on the pages of the *JIH*? As early as Volume I in 1970, the journal presented book reviews dealing, in one way or another, with agricultural history and, during the journal's first two decades of existence, a moderate number of research articles also relevant to the field. Since the 1990s, however, research articles about agricultural history have been scarce. In fact, since 1991, the journal has not published a single paper devoted *primarily* to agricultural history, although pieces with an anthropometric focus often discussed agriculture. Indeed, even in the 1970s and 1980s, several of the fourteen pieces classified herein as "agricultural history" could have been described instead as investigations of slavery, famines, or peasant revolts.

The relative dearth of research essays and articles on agriculture in the *JIH* is not altogether surprising. The journal's scope is general, its aims interdisciplinary, and its preference innovation. As suggested above, during much of the *JIH*'s existence, the specialist field of agricultural history was traditional, not especially interdisciplinary, and, with a few notable exceptions, seldom groundbreaking. Hence, outside of reviews, work in the field was not highly visible in this journal.

The situation regarding the cognate fields and approaches that served to revivify agricultural history in recent decades was far different. In that respect, the *JIH*, true to form, displays its cardinal traits: Articles on food history appeared as early as 1971; papers focusing on environmental history had appeared by the late 1970s; and the journal's first article in historical anthropometrics arrived in 1982, just as that methodological subfield was emerging. The journal played a major role in promoting the early development of each of these areas of study, offering landmark special issues on "History and Climate" (Spring 1980), with seventeen contributions, and

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"Hunger and History" (August 1983) with twenty-one contributions. Similarly, since the appearance of the *JIH*'s first piece on historical anthropometrics in 1982, the journal has published another twenty pieces in this vein, thus becoming one of the major champions (and publication outlets) for inventive interdisciplinary work of this sort. Clearly, the *JIH* has proven helpful to the rise of each of these fields, and by valorizing and disseminating ideas, concepts, and frameworks associated with them, it has arguably facilitated the transformation of agricultural history into a fecund and fertile *new* field.[2]

THE HISTORY OF FOOD HISTORY On one level—the level of production—food has long been central to the study of history. The legions of historians who study the role of agriculture and agriculturalists around the world in great detail have amassed heaps of information about food production from the "invention" of agriculture roughly 10,000 years ago—the so-called Neolithic Revolution (a term coined by Childe, an Australian archaeologist, in the mid-1930s)—to the present day. Although those historians gave their closest attention to crop and animal production, in the form of farming regimens, labor systems, technology, and the like, they also covered, at least to some extent, input acquisition and the distribution of farm output. Over time, interested parties learned something about pre-production and post-harvest activities as well —not enough, but not a negligible amount either. Food history focused firmly on matters material and fit snugly within the frame of agricultural history, traditionally conceived.[3]

Food historians today approach their subject differently, generally focusing on food as an expression of culture, a marker of identity, a representation or signifier of taste and discernment, and a lens or prism through which to explore *mentalités*, etc. Food studies of this kind have been around a long time in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, folklore, and psychology, but in the discipline of history they are of relatively recent vintage and still awaiting complete legitimization. To be sure, narrow cadres of historians interested in culinary history and the history

2 These trends are based on an analysis of *JIH* content running from the first issue of Volume I (Autumn 1970) through the second issue of Volume XLIX (Autumn 2018).

3 V. Gordon Childe, *New Light on the Most Ancient East* (New York, 1952; orig. pub. with this title, 1934), 23.

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of cuisine have occupied the connoisseurial edges of the discipline, but not until the 1960s did the broader cultural dimensions of food start to acquire serious scholarly treatment.

In that decade, historians associated with the journal *Annales: Economies, Societés, Civilisations*, for example, began publishing pieces on food that pushed beyond narrow connoisseurship—indeed, beyond the larder and the kitchen table—focusing mainly on the effects of diet and nutrition on various historical peoples and groups. These studies were more social than cultural in orientation—given the manner in which cultural pieces on food were eventually to be written as time passed—and they anticipated work in historical anthropometrics as much as food studies. Nonetheless, by employing documentation related to food to raise new scholarly questions, they began to take food history down new, broader paths.[4]

Scholarly works in the 1970s, such as Crosby's *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, 1972) and Braudel's three-volume *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XVe–XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1967–1979) continued what the *Annales* started in the 1960s, drawing attention to matters large and small illuminated by food. According to Crosby, biotic migrations, including those of foodstuffs—migrations that previous generations of historians barely glossed—were important to understanding phenomena ranging from the demographic collapse of Native American societies in the centuries after 1492 to African slavery in the Western Hemisphere and population growth in Europe and Africa. In the first volume of *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalism*, Braudel's masterful discussions of the various effects of wheat and rice in world history and his anthropologically informed insights about what food, cooking, and table manners can reveal about social and cultural life energized everyone who engaged with his work. Truth be told, however, Crosby's book, which was published by a relatively obscure press after being rejected by numerous mainstream outlets, took time to gather steam, gaining broad scholarly purchase only after Braudel's multi-volume work was fully translated into English (1981–1984).[5]

4 See, for example, John C. Super, "Food and History," *Journal of Social History*, XXXVI (2002), 165–178; Warren Belasco, "Food History as a Field," in Paul Freedman, Joyce E. Chaplin, and Ken Albala (eds.), *Food in Time and Place* (Berkeley, 2014), 1–17.

5 Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, 1972); Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XVe–XVIIIe*

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During the 1970s, most of the exciting work relevant to food history continued to originate in, and radiate from, the allied disciplines mentioned earlier, particularly anthropology and sociology. Important new work, however, also began to emerge in environmental history and historical anthropometrics, destined to play key roles in the decades ahead (about which, more anon). The end of the decade was marked by two important developments in the field of food history. In May 1979, the first three seminars of the now-famous Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery took place, organized by food historian Alan Davidson and the eminent historian of France, Theodore Zeldin. In that same year, *Petits Propos Culinaires*, the world's first journal of "food studies and food history," was founded, the first issue appearing in 1980.[6]

Yet, food history did not really break out until the 1980s, in large part because food, as a subject of inquiry, comported so well with approaches, concepts, and conceits associated with cultural history, at that point the hottest area in the historical field. The fact that cultural historians during that decade were heavily influenced by structural and cultural anthropologists who wrote frequently and substantively about food—Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, Clifford Geertz, Marvin Harris, etc.—as well as theorists such as Roland Barthes and Bourdieu, whose interests lay in the semiotics of food and eating, helps to explain the surge of writing in food history during the 1980s.[7]

That said, Mintz was the anthropologist who arguably exerted the most influence in that decade and those that followed. Not particularly theoretical in orientation, he nonetheless inspired

siècle (Paris, 1967–1979), 3 v., published in English as (trans. Siân Reynolds), *Civilization and Capitalism 15th–18th Century* (New York, 1981–1984). An early, shorter, preliminary version of Braudel's argument was published in English as (trans. Miriam Kochan), *Capitalism and Material Life 1400–1800* (New York, 1975). For Crosby's difficulty in finding a publisher for *Columbian Exchange*, see the interview by Meghan Gambino, "Alfred W. Crosby on *The Columbian Exchange*," *Smithsonian.com* (4 Oct. 2011), available at https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/alfred-w-crosby-on-the-columbian-exchange-98116477/ (accessed September 15, 2018).

6 For the origins and early history of the Oxford Symposium, see the historical section on the Symposium's website https://www.oxfordsymposium.org.uk/early-history/ (accessed September 15, 2018).

7 See, for example, Freedman, "Preface," in *idem*, Chaplin, and Albala (eds.), *Food in Time and Place*, xi–xxi; Belasco, "Food History as a Field." For a "taste" of Bourdieu on these matters, see Bourdieu (trans. Richard Nice), *Distinction: A Social Critique of Judgement and Taste* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), 175–208.

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scholars all over the world with the publication of *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1986), in which he demonstrated the crucial links between the European demand for sugar and the African slave trade, capitalist plantations in the Americas, and the transformation of bourgeois eating rituals and working-class nutrition in Europe. Although scholars had studied the histories of individual crops—Redcliffe N. Salaman's *The History and Social Influence of the Potato* (Cambridge, 1949) being a case in point—no scholarly work of this type, before or since, has ever enjoyed the influence of Mintz's *Sweetness and Power.* The book quickly became the primary motivating force behind the sub-genre of scholarly and nonscholarly work often known as "commodity studies," treating plants such as corn, wheat, coffee, cotton, tobacco, rice, indigo, manioc, bananas, peaches, chocolate/cacao, henequen/sisal/abacá, etc., as prisms through which to analyze economic, environmental, cultural, and political issues. Indeed, it is the rare, seemingly forlorn plant today that does not have its own historian. Even rhubarb has a good one, Clifford M. Foust, who penned *Rhubarb: The Wondrous Drug* (Princeton, 1992).[8]

Such commodity studies represent only one strain of work that has developed in the field of food history and, more broadly, food studies since the 1980s. The so-called cultural turn in historical studies during that decade led to a tsunami of scholarship on food and foodways, ranging from the history of eating disorders and food phobias to the rise of the restaurant and the origins of cookbooks to national cuisines. More sociologically inclined scholars followed suit, publishing extensively on the history of food-distribution networks, food production/dietary regimes, famines, hunger, and obesity. High-profile historians emerged in the food-history field—for example, Belasco and Harvey Levenstein in the early days and Donna R. Gabaccia, Freedman, Amy Bentley, Jeffrey M. Pilcher, and James E. McWilliams later—and we now have listservs, specialized websites, and conferences galore.

A number of impressive food handbooks, encyclopedias, and compendia have appeared, and food-history collections see regular

8 In 1985, British journalist Henry Hobhouse also published an important early study in the commodity genre, *Seeds of Change: Five Plants That Transformed Mankind* (London, 1985). This study garnered a great deal of attention from, and sales to, general audiences. Hobhouse's top five crops were sugar, tea, cotton, the potato, and quinine. In a revised edition, published in 1999, he added a sixth crop, the cocoa plant.

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publication, along with several established journals in food history, such as *Global Food History*, now in its fourth year. Food journals with broader mandates, like *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* (2001–), often feature historical essays, and new food programs arise with increasing frequency. The field has become popular with younger scholars of all genders, and, important for our purposes in this article, the interests of these scholars often cross into agricultural history, providing that venerable—some would say, wizened—field the possibility of a second act. This re-emergence owes much to the nearly simultaneous ascent of another cognate field, environmental history.[9]

Environmental History Most scholars trace the beginnings of environmental history to the late 1960s and early 1970s, seeing it as a scholarly outgrowth of the broader environmental movement that was coming to prominence. Writers from a variety of backgrounds and disciplinary perspectives—human ecology, geography, conservation biology, and the like—had already been working on related and relevant themes. The list includes not only iconic figures like Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson but also more obscure ones like Julian Steward, Eugene Odum, Carl Sauer, and Paul Sears; Sears' work in the 1940s and 1950s was to prove extremely influential among environmental historians. Moreover, political historians in the United States had generated a sizable literature on the conservation/preservation movements, including most notably Hays' *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency* (Pittsburgh, 1999), which focuses on the Progressive era.[10]

Without getting too deeply into the weeds, we can depict environmental history as the study of the relationship between human cultures and environment in the past. Its principal goal,

9 See Freedman, Chaplin, and Albala (eds.), *Food in Time and Place*; Matt Garcia, "Setting the Table: Historians, Popular Writers, and Food History," *Journal of American History*, CIII (2016), 656–678; Pilcher, "The Embodied Imagination in Recent Writings on Food History," *American Historical Review*, CXXI (2016), 861–887.

10 Sarah T. Phillips, "Environmental History," in Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (eds.), *American History Now* (Philadelphia, 2011), 285–313; Paul S. Sutter, "The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History," *Journal of American History*, C (2013), 94–119; Donald Worster, "Fear and Redemption in the Environment Movement," in Coclanis and Stuart Bruchey (eds.), *Ideas, Ideologies, and Social Movements: The United States Experience Since 1800* (Columbia, S.C., 1999), 158–172; Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890–1920* (Cambridge, Mass.,1959). For more discussion of environmental history in this journal and elsewhere, see Steven A. Epstein's special article, "Environmental History in the *JIH*, 1970–2020," in this issue.

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as Worster famously put it, is one "of deepening our understanding of how humans have been affected by their natural environment through time and, conversely, how they have affected that environment and with what results." Although food history and environmental history have different taproots, they share some genetic material. Both fields drew from concerns and methods associated with social history—for example, the research priorities, expansive time horizons, and eco-geographical emphases frequently on display in *Annales ESC* during the 1960s and 1970s—and both credit Crosby as a progenitor, viewing *The Columbian Exchange*, which foregrounds both food and environmental concerns, in reverential terms.[11]

The Relationship between Environmental and Agricultural History

Throughout the course of the three scholarly generations since its emergence, environmental history has moved from the margins to the epicenter of historical inquiry, in some ways mirroring broader socio-cultural trends regarding environmental issues. Given the "ground" that they shared, agricultural history and environmental history were destined to find each other, but what economists call the discovery process was slower than might have been expected, for a variety of reasons.

Differences in the "cultures" of the two fields and in the prevalent ideological assumptions of practitioners in each were at least partially responsible for the protracted nature of the discovery process. As late as the 1990s, agricultural history was dominated by scholars from—or who could at least claim an affinity with—land-grant institutions, generally those with well-regarded schools of agriculture, especially in the Midwest. Thus, the majority of the participants at the meetings of the Agricultural History Society—the oldest and most respected organization of its kind in the world—tended to be from the universities Iowa State, Kansas State, Wisconsin-Madison, Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Texas A & M, Cornell, California-Davis, or Georgia, although non–land-grant universities such as Oklahoma, Iowa, and Florida

11 Worster, "Doing Environmental History," in *idem* (ed.), *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (New York, 1988), 289–307, esp. 290–291 (quotation); John R. McNeill, "Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History," *History & Theory*, XL (2003), 5–43; Andrew C. Isenberg, "A New Environmental History," in *idem* (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental History* (New York, 2014), 3–20. See also the works cited in n. 10.

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State, and personnel from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) were represented, too (the number of people there in recent decades affiliated with, or separated by only a degree of freedom or two from, Iowa State is remarkable).

Notwithstanding some coincidence between the schools where agricultural historians trained and/or taught and those where the "newbie" environmental historians originated, the relationships between the two sets of schools did not seem to overlap much at first. The University of Wisconsin was one major exception. However, even at Wisconsin-Madison—where the distinguished environmental historians Roderick Nash and Carolyn Merchant did their graduate work and, later, William Cronon spent his undergraduate years—the connection of environmental history with intellectual history, the history of science, and especially frontier history and the history of the West seems to have been tighter than that with agricultural history per se.[12]

Wisconsin was an established center for studying both frontier history and western history: How could it be otherwise with a scholarly roster running directly from Frederick Jackson Turner to Frederic L. Paxson, John Hicks, Merle Curti, Vernon Carstensen, Bogue (an original and active member the *JIH*'s board of editors), and Cronon? Nor was Wisconsin the only university with a strength in western history/history of the frontier that served as a breeding ground for environmental historians during the field's early years. Two of the most important early figures in the field, Worster and Cronon, both did their graduate work at Yale University under the guidance of Howard Lamar. But such close coincidence was the exception rather than the rule. Since the 1990s, however, more overlap has clearly occurred, and some universities—Georgia and Mississippi State, for example—excel in both fields.[13]

12 The lack of connection between environmental and agricultural history at Wisconsin-Madison is surprising, given the presence there of the eminent agricultural historians Allan Bogue from 1964 to 1991 and Morton Rothstein from the early 1960s until 1984, before he moved to the University of California-Davis to succeed James Shideler as editor of *Agricultural History*.

13 See Jon K. Lauck, "The Last Prairie Historian: An Interview with Professor Allan G. Bogue, Historian of the Midwest," *Middle West Review*, I (2014), 91–105; interview with Morton Rothstein, conducted by Peter H. Lindert, October 29, 1998, University of California-Davis, available at https://video.ucdavis.edu/media/Morton+Rothstein/0_3t27d62b (accessed September 16, 2018). Note that Bogue was closely associated with *The Journal of Interdisciplinary* History from its inception in 1970 until the time of his death;

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In addition to the early lack of institutional overlap between agricultural history and environmental history, the practitioners of the two fields held few fundamental assumptions in common. Although, broadly speaking, scholars in both fields dealt with the relationship between human cultures in past environments, agricultural historians were more likely to privilege human actions (and judge their results more favorably) and to view the environment in more instrumental terms—the provision of the food and fiber necessary and sufficient to support human life.

Most agricultural historians explored the means and relations of production in agriculture or the social, cultural, and political expressions and concomitants associated therewith. Until the arrival of environmental history onto the scholarly stage, they generally did not concentrate on the environment per se; nor did they view it in reciprocal terms. They usually treated it, whether explicitly or implicitly, as "land" in the economist's sense—a bundle of "natural" resources for humans to utilize in the process of production. They granted the environment special attention primarily when some aspect of it impeded said process—the expense of land-clearing, for example, or migration, or expensive reclamation projects driven by soil erosion.

Unsurprisingly, environmental historians took a vastly different approach, analyzing the interaction between humans and their environment in a reciprocal way, almost as mathematical equals regardless of the variables involved. They also had their ideological differences with agricultural historians, and still do. Phillips among others has made the important distinction between environmental historians and *environmentalist* historians who embrace and often practice hard or soft forms of environmental advocacy. She suggests that environmental historians are aware of this distinction and generally abide by it, though both branches tend to share commitments to the environment that differ in degree, if not in

he wrote for it and served on the editorial board from 1970 until 2002 before becoming an editor emeritus until 2016. Bogue's wife, Margaret Beattie Bogue, was also a distinguished agricultural and environmental historian of the Midwest based in Madison, teaching in the extension and outreach divisions of the University of Wisconsin from 1966 until 1991. She finally received a joint appointment in History in 1989, two years before her retirement. She became president of the Agricultural History Society in 1984 and a fellow of the society in 1995. See "*Agricultural History* Talks to Allan and Margaret Bogue," *Agricultural History*, LXXIX (2005), 347–369; Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, "In Memoriam: Margaret Beattie Bogue (June 14, 1924–March 8, 2018)," *Agricultural History*, XCII (2018), 261–263.

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kind, from those that agricultural historians share about any facet of agriculture.[14]

Some of the differences between environmental(ist?) historians and (traditional) agricultural historians in the early 1990s are evident in a narrative (in which, alas, I was a principal contributor) that involves one of the *ur* texts in modern environmental history, Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991). In this important and hugely influential study, Cronon not only punctures any residual Turnerian beliefs about the development narrative in the U.S. West; he also offers a provocative interpretation of Chicago's rise, which he insists was predicated on the systematic, and egregious, exploitation of the resources of the city's vast continental hinterland. By making his case with vigor and with considerable empirical support, he sought to baptize the concept of *second nature*—mankind's artificial manipulation of "first nature." *Nature's Metropolis* received a great deal of attention, won several prizes, and attracted overwhelmingly positive reviews.[15]

A few traditional agricultural historians demurred, including myself. For better or worse, I wrote a strongly worded critical essay about the book in *Reviews in American History* (1992), that accused Cronon of being smug and his argument in *Nature's Metropolis* of being tendentious and anti-capitalist to the point of misanthropy in its zealous defense of "first nature," or something akin to nature. In Cronon's narrative, a vaguely defined but clearly pernicious "logic of capital" was responsible for the decline of milling, lumbering, and meatpacking—the three resource-based processing industries upon which he focuses almost all of his attention—and thus the city's economy. In other words, a development strategy based on resource extraction and exploitation was a monumental mistake. I interpreted the situation differently, however, maintaining that in shedding those industries, Chicago was moving purposively and decisively into other better and more sophisticated valued-added ones—iron and steel, machine-shop/foundry

14 Phillips, "Environmental History," 285.

15 Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991). In the wake of Cronon's work, environmentalists such as anthropologist Anna Louwenhaupt Tsing at the University of California-Santa Cruz have elaborated on his concept of "second nature"—nature after transformation by (capitalistic) humans—by drawing attention to "third nature," which for Tsing is "what manages to live despite capitalism." See *idem*, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, 2015), viii.

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products, and railroad cars, as well as clothing/apparel and tobacco products. In those new endeavors, the city was to become a national leader, but Cronon had not seen fit to discuss them.[16]

My review captured considerable attention—not all of it favorable, by any means. Today, it is often paired with Cronon's book for educational purposes as a useful heuristic foil. I bring up this little dust-up not for promotional purposes but to illustrate the degree to which at least some agricultural historians in the early 1990s still harbored suspicions about the arguments and even the motivations of "green" historians.

Ironically, at about the same time, momentous change was afoot. More ironically, the spark for it was a high-profile and much-debated 1990 piece written by Worster—a central figure in environmental history even more critical of capitalist agriculture and capitalism in general than was Cronon. In it, Worster made a galvanizing case for what he called an "agroecological perspective" among environmental historians, which inspired many of them to explore more closely what agricultural historians had done and were doing. In time, or more accurately, in relatively short order, such exploration led to increasing communication and eventually to a colonization movement. By the end of the 1990s, agricultural history had become home to many graduate students and younger scholars who had migrated from environmental history, or food history, forever changing both the intellectual dynamics *and* the demographics of agricultural history as a distinct field.[17]

THE NEW AGRICULTURAL HISTORY The past two decades have witnessed the emergence of the "new" agricultural history, a development inclined toward greater interdisciplinarity because of its openness to change, thanks mainly to those youngish boundary-crossers from environmental history and food history. Once the field opened to such newcomers, similar crossings by business historians, historians of science/technology, labor historians, economic historians, historical geographers, and historians of gender ensued. Moreover, with the coming of the new agricultural history, the sociology and culture of the field changed as well, acquiring much

16 Coclanis, "Urbs in Horto," *Reviews in American History*, XX (1992), 14–20.

17 Worster, "Transformation of the Earth: Toward an Agroecological Perspective in History," *Journal of American History*, LXXVI (1990), 1087–1106; Sutter, "World with Us," 105–109.

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greater representation of "neo-aggies" from "Moo U's" such as Harvard, Yale, and Columbia. Who knew? The mash-up brought agricultural history from the margins into the mainstream, much nearer to the center of research in the historical field. Although the *JIH* did not lead the charge across disciplinary boundaries, it certainly was helpful in its role as a venue for scholars exploring new subfields and themes, and, even more important, for modeling interdisciplinarity, which, after all, is the journal's *raison d'être*.

The new agricultural history contrasts sharply from the old in many ways but, first and foremost, in its broader remit. As suggested earlier, traditional agricultural historians had focused on matters of production (in other words, farmers in the field) or, to stretch the point a little, on farm politics. The new agricultural historians, however, began to conceive of agricultural history as incorporating the vicissitudes of rural life more generally—input acquisition and the disposition of farm output, the relationship between rural and urban patterns and processes, agriculture's place in larger ecological/environmental systems, and economic circuits and orbits ranging from the local to the global.

The success of new journals, such as the *Journal of Rural Studies* (1985), *Histoire & Societes Rurales* (1990), and *Rural History: Economy, Society, Culture* (1990), and new organizations, such as EURHO (European Rural History Organisation), is one manifestation of that expansion, although rural history as a separate field of inquiry, not to mention other antecedents, had an initial growth spurt slightly earlier, in the 1980s. The same holds true in general for the mushrooming genre often known as commodity studies, the popularity of which owed much to the intellectual and commercial success of Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* in the mid-1980s. In that vein, we can only wonder at the deforestation necessary to print Mark Kurlansky's numerous books about cod, oysters, milk, American food in the pre-modern era, Clarence Birdseye, etc., as well as his anthologies of food writing (I, too, have delved into commodity history in my work on rice and its evolving place in economic circuits across the globe for the past 350 years).[18]

18 For further details regarding Kurlansky's massive food corpus, see his website http://www.markkurlansky.com/ (accessed September 16, 2018). For a brief, early introduction to the major themes treated in my study of rice, see Coclanis, "Distant Thunder: The Creation of a World Market in Rice and the Transformations It Wrought," *American Historical Review*, XCVIII (1993), 1050–1078.

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Other writers used the new remit to change the angle of refraction, the register, etc., of their studies. Take the global turn, for example. Many historical studies in recent decades have focused on agricultural developments in global perspective, particularly on the global supply chains involving food and fiber that emerged in the early modern and modern eras. Less familiar are those that experiment with narrative strategies, employing unusual lenses or aural ranges in agricultural and environmental history—among them, William Least Heat-Moon's *Prairy-Erth: A Deep Map* (New York, 1991), William T. Vollmann's *Imperial* (New York, 2009), Madeleine Bunting's *The Plot: The Story of a Father and an English Acre* (London, 2009), and, further back, John Berger's *Pig Earth* (New York, 1979).

Collaboration and Incorporation Nonetheless, the new agricultural history is more concerned with incorporating new interests rather than devising new discursive strategies. One result of this cross-pollination is the increased difficulty of clearly distinguishing "agricultural" historians from specialists in other subfields, particularly if they do not explicitly identify their provenance. For instance, was Kirby an agricultural historian or an environmental historian, or both, later in his career? What about other fine "hybrid" scholars such as Mart Stewart, Mark Hersey, and Bert Way? What about the scholar of Southeast Asia Peter Boomgaard or the scholar of Africa James C. McCann? It is difficult to say, but given the degree of boundary crossing between the fields, such distinctions really no longer matter as much as they used to.[19]

In this era of incorporation, virtually all agricultural historians now devote increased attention to the short-term and long-term environmental effects of cultivation practices and regimes, as well as to matters of systemic sustainability. Agro-environmental scholars now take economic matters more seriously, particularly negative externalities. Furthermore, as environmental historians and food historians, who often favor ethical questions, joined

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19 See, for example, Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920–1960* (Baton Rouge, 1987); *idem*, *Poquosin: A Study of Rural Landscape and Society* (Chapel Hill, 1995); *idem*, *Mockingbird Song: Ecological Landscapes of the South* (Chapel Hill, 2006). Kirby served as President of the Agricultural History Society in 1993/4. In 2010, shortly after his death in 2009, the Southern Historical Association established the Jack Temple Kirby Prize for the best journal article in either southern agricultural history or southern environmental history over a two-year period.

the fold, the field of agricultural history became more accepting of, and comfortable with, normative judgments about people, policies, and political arrangements in the past. Indeed, phalanxes of newcomers arriving from environmental history and food history cut their teeth on theories and arguments based on the assumption that capitalist agriculture and capitalist food systems were inherently exploitive, inequitable, and unethical to nature and humans alike. The challenge that such "declensionist" views posed to agricultural historians of a more traditional persuasion, who tended to be positivist in orientation and supportive of capitalist agriculture, was both provocative *and* exhilarating, gradually creating more sophisticated and comprehensive interpretations of what might be called food systems. Works of that kind are now commonplace for the United States as well as other parts of the world. For example, within the last decade alone, Biggs, McElwee, and Aso, among others, have written excellent studies about Vietnam, which once may have been considered far-flung.[20]

Speaking of food systems, some historians—myself and Shane Hamilton, to name just two—have drawn insights from not only the commodity-chain/supply-chain literature in the social sciences but also from input-output analysis and, more specifically, from John H. Davis and Ray Goldberg's foundational book, *A Concept of Agribusiness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957). Hamilton and I, each in our own way, have made a case for the efficacy of approaches spanning the sequence from input acquisition and farm finance through production, harvest, post-harvest activities (storage and wholesale distribution), retail sales, food/fiber consumption, waste/waste management, etc. Because of the ever-increasing number of works on parts of this "system"—Hamilton's *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton, 2014) springs to mind—the task of synthesis is becoming easier; it will soon be available for the asking. Other scholars engaged in systems thinking have used the *nexus* concept in water studies to explore the relationship between water, energy, land use, food,

20 David Biggs, *Quagmire: Nation-Building and Nature in the Mekong Delta* (Seattle, 2010); Pamela D. McElwee, *Forests Are Gold: Trees, People, and Environmental Rule in Vietnam* (Seattle, 2016); Michitake Aso, *Rubber and the Making of Vietnam: An Ecological History, 1897–1975* (Chapel Hill, 2018). Among the scholars pursuing similar lines elsewhere, see McCann, who has a rich body of work on the agro-environmental history of Africa, particularly Ethiopia and East Africa, and Mark Elvin and Kenneth Pomeranz, who write about China.

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and human rights around the world. Moreover, the notion of food regimes, which is consistent with, and benefits from, systems approaches, is becoming established in the agricultural historian's tool kit. Questions regarding the environment, production, nutrition, etc., are increasingly folded into such regimes, whether "industrial" or LOS (local, organic, slow), as scholars analyze the consequences arising therefrom or at least associated therewith.[21]

Among those specialists in fields other than environmental history and food history who have found a home in agricultural history are historians of African-American history. Many of them found inspiration in historical geographer Judith Carney's *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), which incited a lively (and protracted) debate, however improbable, about the origins of rice technology in the Western Hemisphere. Similarly, following in the footsteps of scholars such as Vaclav Smil, Deborah Fitzgerald, and Francesca Bray, who have made lasting contributions to our understanding of agricultural technology, a new generation of historians of science and technology studies (STS)—Hahn and Saraiva, among others—have raised new questions and offered provocative answers about that theme. Hahn and Saraiva, along with Bray and John Bosco Lourdusamy, are engaged in a research initiative entitled "Moving Crops and the Scales of History," which, when completed, could well disrupt our thinking about not just the history of technology but also agricultural history and the history of globalization. Finally, a number of "new" agricultural historians have deployed GIS and its software tools in a reorientation of our spatial conceptions of historical developments in rural America—Cunfer's superb agro- environmental studies of the Great Plains being a case in point.[22]

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21 John H. Davis and Ray Goldberg, *A Concept of Agribusiness* (Boston, 1957); Coclanis, "Breaking New Ground: From the History of Agriculture to the History of Food Systems," *Historical Methods*, XXXVIII (2005), 5–13; Shane Hamilton, "Revisiting the History of Agribusiness," *Business History Review*, XC (2016), 541–545. For the record, Bruchey and Coclanis employed Davis and Goldberg's concept in "A History of Agribusiness in the United States," in Giulio Pontecorvo (ed.), *The Management of Food Policy* (New York, 1976), 149–192. See Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton, 2008). For the nexus concept, see especially Felix Dodds and Jamie Bartram (eds.), *The Water, Food, Energy and Climate Nexus: Challenges and an Agenda for Action* (New York, 2016). In recent decades, several socialist journals, especially *Monthly Review*, have aggressively pursued research on food regimes, agro-environmentalism, etc.

22 For the fullest critique of Carney's argument, see David Eltis, Philip Morgan, and David Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History: Reassessing the African Contribution

Like agricultural studies in the STS mode, the so-called new history of American capitalism has created quite a stir in recent years. Numerous scholars associated with this movement focus on southern agriculture, particularly the relationship between slavery, plantations, commodity production, and the course of U.S. history. Their controversial work returns slavery and southern agriculture to the position of scholarly prominence that it last enjoyed in the 1970s.[23]

Labor historians, too, have been finding agriculture and the food system fertile fields for research. Historians such as Cindy Hahamovitch, Matt Garcia, Deborah Fink, Roger Horowitz, Bryant Simon, and Monica Gisolfi, as well as labor anthropologists such as Steve Striffler have done important work on farm workers, farm animals, meat production, and meatpacking, and, further up the food supply chain, several studies of kitchen workers, servers, and the entire food-service industry have recently appeared. Hribal has written about farm animals as agricultural "workers," and other scholars about plant "agency" in agriculture, including "quorum sensing" among soil bacteria. The budding area of inquiry known as "coevolutionary history," which brings together history and biology, has galvanized the interest and attention of not a few young agricultural historians.[24]

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to Rice Culture in the Americas," *American Historical Review*, CXII (2007), 1329–1358. See also "*AHR* Exchange: The Question of 'Black Rice,'" *ibid.*, CXV (2010), 123–150. Barbara M. Hahn, *Making Tobacco Bright: Creating an American Commodity, 1617–1937* (Baltimore, 2011); Tiago Saraiva, *Fascist Pigs: Technoscientific Organisms and the History of Fascism* (Cambridge, Mass., 2016). For information about the "Moving Crops and the Scales of History" project, see the group's website https://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/research/projects/moving-crops-and-scale-history (accessed September 16, 2018). For a sample of Cunfer's work, see *idem*, "Scaling the Dust Bowl," in Anne Kelly Knowles (ed.), *Placing History: How Maps, Spatial Data, and GIS are Changing Historical Scholarship* (Redlands, 2008), 95–121; Cunfer and Fridolin Krausmann, "Adaptation on an Agricultural Frontier: Socio-Ecological Profiles of Great Plains Settlement, 1870–1940," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XLVI (2016), 1–38.

23 For a concise analytical discussion of the new history of American capitalism, see Sven Beckert and Christine Desan, "Introduction," in *idem* (eds.), *American Capitalism: New Histories* (New York, 2018), 1–32; for interesting assessments of this new formulation, the discussion entitled "Interchange: The History of Capitalism," *Journal of American History*, CI (2014), 503–536; Eric Hilt, "Economic History, Historical Analysis, and the 'New History of Capitalism,'" *Journal of Economic History*, LXXVII (2017), 511–536; for the place of slavery in the new history of capitalism, Beckert and Seth Rockman (eds.), *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia, 2016); for critiques of the new views of slavery's role, John J. Clegg, "Capitalism and Slavery," *Critical Historical Studies*, II (2015), 281–304; Coclanis, "Slavery, Capitalism, and the Problem of Misprision," *Journal of American Studies*, LII (2018), available at https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875818000464.

24 See Jason C. Hribal, "'Animals Are Part of the Working Class': A Challenge to Labor History," *Labor History*, XLIV (2003), 435–453; *idem*, "Animals, Agency, and Class: Writing

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The surging interest in women's history and gender history since the 1980s has affected agricultural history as well. Scholars working in these areas have forced us to qualify generalizations and to acknowledge activities previously considered beyond our proper scope, thereby enabling fuller assessments of the dynamics in both agriculture and rural life. More recently, gender historians like Rosenberg have also challenged conventional narratives and enriched traditional interpretive schemes.[25]

The work of labor historians and women's/gender historians interested in agricultural themes has often dovetailed in recent years with that of oral historians. Sharpless and Jones have published excellent books in U.S. rural and agricultural history that rely heavily upon the methods of oral history, as have scholars studying other agricultural regions—Charles van Onselen, for one, whose riveting *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894–1985* (New York, 1996) is reminiscent of Theodore Rosengarten's *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* (Chicago, 1974), a classic in U.S. agricultural history.[26]

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the History of Animals from Below," *Human Ecology Review*, XIV (2007), 101–112; Owain Jones, "Non-Human Rural Studies," in Paul J. Cloke, Terry Marsden, and Patrick Mooney (eds.), *Handbook of Rural Studies* (Thousand Oaks, 2006), 185–200; Ann Norton Greene, *Horses at Work: Harnessing Power in Industrial America* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), 189–199; Ulrich Raulff (trans. Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp), *Farewell to the Horse: A Cultural History* (New York, 2018). For plant agency, see, for example, Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World* (New York, 2001); for the related concept of *coevolution* regarding plants and humans, Edmund Russell, *Evolutionary History: Uniting History and Biology to Understand Life on Earth* (New York, 2011). Many authorities extend "agency" to bacteria as well, arguing that some bacteria employ "quorum sensing" to coordinate various actions and activities. See, for example, Paul Williams, Klaus Winzer, Weng C. Chan, and Miguel Cámara, "Look Who's Talking: Communication and Quorum Sensing in the Bacterial World," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, B Biological Sciences*, March 13, 2007, available at doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2007.2039; Sarangam Majumdar and Subhoshmita Mondal, "Conversation Game: Talking Bacteria," *Journal of Cell Communication and Signaling*, X (2016): 1–5, available at doi:10.1007/s12079-016-0333-y (accessed September 17, 2018). Not all bacteriologists buy the argument that bacteria work consciously and collectively.

25 Scholarship about the history of women in agriculture has burgeoned in recent decades. For an up-to-date collection of representative work, see Linda M. Ambrose and Joan M. Jensen (eds.), *Women in Agriculture: Professionalizing Rural Life in America and Europe, 1880–1965* (Iowa City, 2017); for an introduction to Gabriel Nathan Rosenberg's work, *idem*, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America* (Philadelphia, 2015); *idem*, "How Meat Changed Sex: The Law of Interspecies Intimacy after Industrial Reproduction," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, XXIII (2017): 473–507.

26 Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900–1940* (Chapel Hill, 1999); Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill, 2002).

A long succession of economists have explored some aspect of agricultural history. Lewis C. Gray, William Parker, Robert Gallman, Robert Fogel, and Stanley Engerman would be on everybody's short list of historians with outstanding studies about the American South. Many of these historians have remained loyal to the field even as it has morphed. On the U.S. front, veteran economists such as Gavin Wright, Jeremy Atack, Lee Craig, Lou Ferleger, and Lee Alston have continued to do important work (although Alston has shifted his attention lately to agriculture and resources in Latin America). Not to be omitted is Lorena Walsh, whose quantitative work on early American agriculture—for example, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit: Plantation Management in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1607–1763* (Chapel Hill, 2010)—is justly admired by economists and non-economists alike. Two others, Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhode, aptly demonstrate the promise that attends the new agricultural history. Olmstead and Rhode, who made major contributions to the agricultural history of the South, are currently completing a path-breaking work on slavery in the Cotton South, but their contributions to U.S. agricultural history more generally are worthy of extended comment.

Olmstead and Rhode Simply put, Olmstead and Rhode represent the new agricultural history at its best, no more astutely than in their co-authored books—*Creating Abundance: Biological Innovation and American Agricultural Development* (New York, 2008) and *Arresting Contagion: Science, Policy, and Conflicts Over Animal Disease Control* (Cambridge, Mass., 2015)—as well as in one of their joint papers. In both books, they advance boldly revisionist arguments that are at once empirically rich, seamlessly cross-disciplinary, and highly persuasive, skillfully bounded by theoretical insights and methods from economics. More impressive is their mastery of historical sources (particularly obscure governmental publications), and their ability to draw from "harder" sciences—plant and animal biology, genetics, soil science, epidemiology, climatology, veterinarian medicine, etc. The upshot is that their overarching arguments quickly challenged and largely superseded conventional views.[27]

In *Creating Abundance*, their emphasis on the importance of biological innovation—not just mechanical innovation—in explaining

27 Olmstead and Rhode, "Adapting North American Wheat Production to Climatic Challenges, 1839–2009," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, CVIII (2011), 480–485.

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productivity gains in U.S. agriculture prior to World War II is already becoming standard. Their principal claim in *Arresting Contagion*—that the governmental regulation of agriculture, particularly of animal-borne diseases, which preceded the governmental regulation of interstate commerce, was highly effective—immediately led many scholars to rethink their positions on regulation, ranging from Neo-Marxist to public-choice options.

As well as these two books showcase the promise inherent in the new agricultural history, their 2011 essay, "Adapting North American Wheat Production to Climatic Challenges, 1839–2009," might take them a step further. In this piece, the authors complicate increasingly popular climate-change, doom-and-gloom narratives by demonstrating convincingly, even conclusively, that in the period between 1839 and the early twenty-first century, American wheat farmers were able to adapt successfully to lands once thought "too arid, too variable, and too harsh to farm." Technological innovation was the key, particularly the biological development of new varieties. Although most such varietal innovation involved adjusting to colder or more arid environments, rather than to warmer temperatures like those looming in the coming decades, the fact that farmers, making use of private and public research, were able to modify crops for different climates offers at least a modicum of hope that they will be able to do so again.[28]

Olmstead and Rhode's findings render less disturbing the fact that by 2050 or thereabouts, the world will have to feed a population that will likely grow to about 10 or 11 billion, with a greater proportion of affluent consumers moving increasingly to protein and dairy-based diets that, given the technology of today, are resource-intensive. At that point, thanks to the effects of climate change, much of the land available for crops will be of inferior quality, with less water, less fertilizer, and fewer pesticides. We can take some solace, however, in the success story of Olmstead and Rhode's North American wheat farmers.

COMPARATIVE, TRANSNATIONAL APPROACHES AND THE WAY FORWARD The *JIH* has been an inveterate promoter of comparative/transnational work, areas in which agricultural historians have become increasingly active. Illuminating transnational studies

28 *Ibid.*, 484.

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have appeared on subjects ranging from the agricultural labor force to the boll weevil and blood oranges, and from henequen and sisal to agrarian reform. Gavin Wright, John Majewski, and others—including the seemingly ubiquitous Olmstead and Rhode—have produced enlightening comparative studies. Taken together, these studies—and many others—have greatly enriched our understanding of the complex dynamics of U.S. agriculture.[29]

Another subfield that the *JIH* embraced is historical anthropometrics. The traction that this approach has begun to gain among agricultural historians is only fitting since Pitirim Sorokin, a titanic figure in rural studies, was a pioneer in its development during the 1920s and early 1930s. Specialists in agricultural history are returning to these roots. For example, a 2007 study by Bassino and me demonstrated that the biological well-being of rice cultivators in Lower Burma declined significantly as the economy of the region transformed into a rice-export platform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. I explore this matter in closer detail in another work, arguing that during that period, Lower Burma underwent a thoroughgoing "metamorphosis" that affected not only its economy and environment but also the bodies of the people living there. In the process, I tie together several of the main threads of the new agricultural history, perhaps opening an advanced look at the future of the field.[30]

29 Neil Foley, *White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley, 1999); James C. Giesen, *Boll Weevil Blues: Cotton, Myth, and Power in the American South* (Chicago, 2011); Timothy P. Bowman, *Blood Oranges: Colonialism and Agriculture in the South Texas Borderlands* (College Station, 2016); Sterling D. Evans, *Bound in Twine: The History and Ecology of the Henequen–Wheat Complex for Mexico and the American and Canadian Plains, 1880–1950* (College Station, 2007); Tore C. Olsson, *Agrarian Crossings: Reformers and the Making of the US and Mexican Countryside* (Princeton, 2017); Wright, "Slavery and American Agricultural History," *Agricultural History*, LXXVII (2003), 527–552; Majewski, "Why Did Northerners Oppose the Expansion of Slavery? Economic Development and Education in the Limestone South," in Beckert and Rockman (eds.), *Slavery's Capitalism*, 277–298.

30 See, for example, Sorokin, Carle C. Zimmerman, and Charles J. Galpin, *A Systematic Source Book in Rural Sociology* (Minneapolis, 1930–1932), 3 v., esp. III (1932), 5–14; Coclanis, "Pitirim A. Sorokin's Early Contributions to the Development of Anthropometric History," *Economics and Human Biology*, XI (2013), 259–268; Alexander Nikulin and Irina Trotsuk, "Pitirim Sorokin's Contribution to Rural Sociology: Russian, European and American Milestones of a Scientific Career," *Journal of Peasant Studies* (January 25, 2018), available at doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1419190 (accessed September 17, 2018); Jean-Pascal Bassino and Coclanis, "Economic Transformation and Biological Welfare in Colonial Burma: Regional Differentiation in the Evolution of Average Height," *Economics and Human Biology*, VI (2008), 212–227; Coclanis, "Metamorphosis: The Rice Boom, Environmental Transformation,

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But what path is the new agricultural history likely to take? Prognostication is a difficult task, especially for a historian. In Yogi Berra's words, "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future"—too many known unknowns and unknown unknowns, to paraphrase Donald Rumsfeld. Nonetheless, we can say with some confidence that the trend toward a convergence of agricultural history, environmental history, and food history will continue; the exciting work begun during the last few decades shows no signs of abating. A few research areas seem particularly well positioned to grow. In recent years, rural life and culture, rural peoples, and "rurality" in general have become more prominent, at least in part because of the U.S. 2016 presidential election. Yet scholars have also shown a renewed desire to reclaim a world with which they feared to have lost touch. Some of this trepidation seems to have resulted from the worldwide newsflash in 2007 that Earth's population was reaching a tipping point: For the first time in human history, more than half of the total population would soon be considered "urban." Although the "news" was not really earth-shattering—after all, there was little to distinguish the urban proportion in 2008 or 2009 from, say, 2005—it instilled the sense of a general retreat from rural life, piquing the interest of journalists and scholars alike.[31]

In the light of those considerations, various manifestations of rural culture, whether represented in religious expressions, politics/political movements, or music will remain in the public, and academic, purview. One exemplar in a scholarly context is Bethany Moreton's *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009), but other recent works relevant to "southern" culture, though not rural history per se, are revelatory about the rural South: Arlie Russell Hochschild's *Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York, 2016) and Randall J. Stephens' *The*

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and the Problem of Truncation in Colonial Lower Burma, 1850–1940," *Agricultural History*, XCIII (2019), 35–67. Economic historians interested in historical anthropometrics have delved into the complex relationship between environmental and economic change and biological well-being—agricultural historians, not so much.

31 See, for example, Population Reference Bureau, *Urban Population to Become the New Majority Worldwide* (Washington, D.C., 2007), available at https://www.prb.org/urbanpoptobecomemajority/ (accessed September 17, 2018); United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *Urban and Rural Areas 2009* (New York, 2010), available at http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/urbanization/urban-rural.shtml (accessed September 17, 2018).

Devil's Music: How Christians Inspired, Condemned, and Embraced Rock 'n' Roll (Cambridge, Mass., 2018).

Other dimensions of culture—food and foodways—will likely attract attention in the years ahead. As food fads, fetishes, and obsessions become increasingly common in bourgeois culture within the developed world, and as "foodies" run riot in academe, it would be shocking were scholars not to examine or, in some cases, re-examine numerous questions relating to food and foodways in the past from a decidedly modern food-oriented perspective. David S. Shields' *Southern Provisions: The Creation and Revival of a Cuisine* (Chicago, 2015) and Freedman's *Ten Restaurants That Changed America* (New York, 2106) are sophisticated examples of cultural approaches to food and foodways that portend more of the same for the future.

Similarly, in food politics, particularly the politics of food trade/aid, scholars will build on the strong base provided by Nick Cullather, Bill Winders, Raj Patel, Phillips, and others. Food ethics and moral questions relating to food and eating will also ascend in the years ahead, largely owing to Pollan's work. Many of these studies will involve contemporary debates, but some—such as Helen Zoe Veit's *Modern Food, Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 2013)—will look back at related questions during earlier periods of our history. We shall undoubtedly see digital archives/interactives websites modeled after Veit's *What America Ate* initiative.[32]

Another likely growth area will feature climatic issues, including climate change. The relationship between climate and agriculture has been a mainstay in numerous historical works in the years since the *JIH*'s special issue "History and Climate" appeared in 1980. Geoffrey Parker's *Global Crisis: Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, 2013) and John L. Brooke's

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32 Veit's "What America Ate" website is available at http://whatamericaate.org/. Garcia tells an illuminating story regarding Pollan's influence and the trendiness of food history. Before the publication of Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (Chicago, 2006), Garcia had trouble organizing sessions on "agricultural history" for the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians. After Pollan's book appeared, Garcia replaced "agriculture" with "food" in the proposed session title, immediately attracting a much larger crowd. See Garcia, "Setting the Table: Historians, Popular Writers, and Food History," *Journal of American History*, CIII (2016), 657.

Climate Change and the Course of Global History (New York, 2014) are two excellent cases in point.

In light of the overwhelming interest today in the elastic concept known as "sustainability," scholars will undoubtedly revisit and at times, alas, rummage through history in search of connections between environmental stresses, food insecurity, and sociopolitical changes that led to disorder, dysfunction, or even societal destruction. The 800-pound gorilla of this genre is Jared Diamond, particularly in *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York, 2004), but other scholars explore how food insecurity affects both policy and practice: Timothy Snyder's provocative *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York, 2015) is noteworthy in this regard.

Finally, historians could well benefit from moving toward one or another systematic or holistic approach to agriculture, food, and the environment. They need not cover such systems in their entirety; they need only be closely attuned to their existence. In the prescient words of Genovese nearly forty years ago, "No subject is too small to treat. But a good historian writes well on a small subject while taking account (if only implicitly and without a single direct reference) of the whole, whereas an inferior one confuses the need to isolate a small portion of the whole with the license to assume that that portion thought and acted in isolation." To be sure, scholars have already come a long way down this road for the past twenty-five or thirty years. The welcome arrival and subsequent entrenchment of environmental and food historians in agricultural-history circles, as we have seen, has extended the range of activities and themes; diversified the demographics, methods, and ideologies involved; deepened levels of analysis; sharpened debates, and made the field much more interesting overall.[33]

Notwithstanding this impressive evolution in the historical studies surrounding agriculture, we still have a considerable distance to go. One expeditious, perhaps even necessary, way to press forward will require more historians to break from convention to pursue research within larger interdisciplinary (and hopefully international) teams. The use of big data to shed light on food problems

33 Eugene D. Genovese, "American Slaves and Their History," in *idem*, *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History* (New York, 1972), 103. This essay first appeared in the *New York Review of Books*, XV, 3 Dec. 1970.

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of the past can help us to confront pressing problems within this sphere today and tomorrow—nothing less than our highest priorities. As Bertold Brecht put it in *The Three Penny Opera*, food is always the first thing. Orwell made make much the same point in a more sociobiological way in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: "A human being is primarily a bag for putting food into; the other functions and faculties may be more god-like, but in point of time they come afterwards. A man dies and is buried, and all his words and actions are forgotten, but the food he has eaten lives after him in the sound or rotten bones of his children."[34]

This brief sketch cannot hope to cover every aspect of the new agricultural history, nor to mention, much less to highlight, all the impressive work that this rejuvenated field has generated. Rather, the more modest goal is to look at some of the field's newest contours. The editors of the *JIH* are to be saluted for the inspired idea to mount this retrospective/prospective initiative on the pages of the journal. Also worthy of a salute are the distinguished senior agricultural historians who helped to keep hope alive during American agricultural history's relative decline in the second half of the twentieth century by welcoming talented young interlopers into the fold. Without their efforts we would not be discussing this field in the fiftieth anniversary year of the *JIH*, a journal that promoted many of the sources of rejuvenation in agricultural history, and we probably would not be celebrating the Agricultural History Society's centennial in 2019 either.

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34 For a recent overview of the use and potential of "big data" in economic history, see Myron P. Gutmann, Emily Klancher Merchant, and Evan Roberts, "'Big Data' in Economic History," *Journal of Economic History*, LXXVIII (2018), 268–299. For the George Orwell quotation, see *idem*, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (New York, 1961; orig. pub. 1937), 85.