



H-Environment

H-Environment Roundtable Reviews

Volume 13, No. 5 (2023)
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-environment>

Publication date: April 6, 2023
Roundtable Review Editor:
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Sharika D. Crawford, *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean: Waterscapes of Labor, Conservation, and Boundary Making*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-4696-6020-2

Contents

Introduction by Kara Murphy Schlichting, Queens College CUNY	2
Comments by Elizabeth Hennessy, University of Wisconsin-Madison	4
Comments by Comments by Karl Offen, Syracuse University	7
Comments by Russell Fielding, Coastal Carolina University	11
Comments by Mary Draper, Midwestern State University	15
Response by Sharika D. Crawford, United States Naval Academy	19
About the Contributors	23

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 Introduction by Kara Murphy Schlichting, Queens College CUNY

Sharika D. Crawford's *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean: Waterscapes of Labor, Conservation, and Boundary Making* is a history of how human and marine life entwined across two centuries of environmental and geopolitical change in the Caribbean. Drawing together environment history and social history, Crawford reconstructs the lives of men who hunted turtles and identifies their role in the Caribbean's ecology. Crawford focuses on turtlemen based in the Cayman Islands who hunted the green sea turtle and hawksbill sea turtle off Central America's Caribbean coast (the islands and waters off Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama). Crawford captures the transnational migratory networks that turtlemen built across this waterscape. Her maritime perspective and foregrounding of turtlemen's labor reveals that turtling was central to the Caribbean's evolving economies and territories. This roundtable focuses on three themes in *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean*: political ecology, the tragedy of the commons, and hunters' roles in the modern conservation movement. Opening the roundtable, **Elizabeth Hennessy** poses questions on conservation and the concept of the commons. How, she asks Crawford, should environmental historians understand Caymanian turtling with regards to the "tragedy of the commons" narrative? Crawford's treatment of well-known herpetologist Archie Carr and his conservation work features prominently in this roundtable. Hennessy asks Crawford what turtlers' experience, both before and after Carr's arrival, can tell us about the conservation movement.

Karl Offen highlights Crawford's success at blending economic history of capitalization and credit with early Caribbean knowledge of sea turtle behaviors across the western Caribbean. Crawford also shows, Offen points out, how centuries of overfishing of "the turtle commons of Caymanian waters" pushed turtlemen to adapt new technologies and techniques and to range further in search of turtles. Like Hennessy, Offen reflects on Crawford's last chapter, which shifts focus from turtlemen to conservationist Archie Carr. Offen commends Crawford for highlighting Carr's work in seeking out the "traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)" of turtlemen. Crawford shows the environmental, human, and cultural ramifications of conservation restrictions to both conservation zoologists and turtle hurters.

Russell Fielding offers a smart summation of *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean's* structure, deeming each of the five chapters stories of "history-and": i.e., "history-and-labor-economics" (chapter 2), and "history and conservation ecology" (chapter 5). Through this structure Crawford builds a multi-disciplinary yet historically grounded study of indigenous turtling's transformation into a capitalist venture, the closing of the turtle commons, and the conservation movement. Fielding also reflects on how Crawford rethinks the concept of the tragedy of the commons. He notes how Crawford challenges declensionist narratives by not framing turtlemen as one-dimensional "enemies" of turtles.

Like Hennessy, **Mary Draper** commends Crawford for reframing Caribbean environmental and labor history, with its frequent focus on sugar and the plantation complex, around maritime resources. In *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean*, Crawford shifts the historical frame of reference from land to sea to spotlight the fluid geographies of turtlemen. Through this approach, Draper says, Crawford successfully defines the waterscape east of Central America as a unified territory. Focusing on this waterscape also allows Crawford to center the history of the diaspora of Caymanian turtlemen and their labor across the west Caribbean. In this work Draper sees answers to big questions that speak to this roundtable's themes of the commons and political ecology. How open, or "common," was this waterscape, given the territorial disputes between turtlers and the foreign governments who claimed them? How did turtlemen articulate their own sovereignty as states tried to nationalize the west Caribbean and its resources? Draper also points out that while Crawford does not use the term "political ecology," the questions *The Last Turtlemen* raises about common resources, hunters' rights in a commons, and sustainability are central to political ecology scholarship. In Crawford's hands, as Draper eloquently notes, "small islands tell big stories."

Crawford's author response reinforces the lessons at the heart of *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean*. Crawford picks up on three themes of roundtable questions. First, she revisits ideas of conservation in light of the tragedy of the commons. She then reflects on the role of sovereignty and statehood in disputes over turtling grounds. Finally, Crawford also reminds us that we must reconsider the role of those on "peripheries." People distant from the centers of global capitalism were not simply victims, but also participated in the commodity chains and resource extraction that powered capitalist accumulation and its attendant environmental exploitation. In this response Crawford sets an approach of how to take up what she calls "subaltern views of the Anthropocene." Small islands do indeed offer Crawford fertile ground to advance histories of turtlemen's lives, the Caribbean maritime environment, territorial ordering, and state politics.

Before turning to the first set of comments, I would like to pause here and thank all the roundtable participants for taking part. In addition, I would like to remind readers that as an open-access forum, *H-Environment Roundtable Reviews* is available to scholars and non-scholars alike, around the world, free of charge. Please circulate.

Comments by Elizabeth Hennessy, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Rarely do conservationist pleas to “save the sea turtles”—or other popular endangered species—provide much analysis of how charismatic fauna are embedded in the lives and economies of local communities. More common are oversimplified, declensionist narratives like this one, on the [World Wildlife Fund’s website](#): “Over the last 200 years, human activities have tipped the scales against the survival of these ancient mariners. Slaughtered for their eggs, meat, skin, and shells, sea turtles suffer from poaching and over-exploitation.” The implication of such generic accounts is that turtle hunters are portrayed as little better than uncaring, self-interested villains. Yet work in environmental history and political ecology has long argued that the success of conservation efforts hinges on close attention to the cultures, economies, and geographies in which endangered species cohabitate with local communities. In this regard, Sharika Crawford’s important and carefully researched *Last Turtlemen*—although not, I think, intended primarily for conservationist audiences—has much to say to students and practitioners of conservation. By treating the stories of Caymanian turtlers, and their forebearers, with nuance and humanity, Crawford reminds us that the loss of sea turtle populations has meant a concomitant loss of ways of life that, in one form or another, had sustained Caribbean communities for centuries. Understanding these imbrications and their consequences is crucial for devising effective conservation strategies. My questions then are aimed at teasing out the significance of this insightful narrative beyond the scope of the author’s original intentions.

Conservation enters into *Last Turtlemen* only in the penultimate chapter. Crawford is (quite fairly) more concerned with turtlers than with turtles. The bulk of the chapters convincingly show how turtling not only supported diverse Caribbean populations—including the Miskitu and other Indigenous communities; pirates and Euro-descendant sailors; and enslaved Africans, maroons, freedpeople and their descendants—but also was central to the construction of Caribbean geographies. Indeed, this is to my mind the heart of the book and the grounds for its strongest arguments. *Last Turtlemen* is a crucial intervention in Caribbean social, environmental, and political history that attends to what Crawford calls the “maritime Caribbean” to “expand our knowledge...beyond sugar and the plantation complex” (4).

Crawford’s most compelling methodological move comes from shifting the focus of Caribbean historiography from land to sea to draw attention to the consequential agency of turtle hunters, a population ubiquitous in Caribbean history and yet nearly absent from the historiography. The text, which draws from early modern travel narratives, a trove of oral histories with Caymanian turtle hunters, and diplomatic correspondence concerning access to marine resources, follows turtlers as they traveled across the Caribbean, braving rough seas and at times less-than-warm welcomes from competing fishers to visit the reefs and nesting beaches where sea turtles are most easily found. The result is a shift of perspective from large plantation

islands to smaller isles, “regional nooks,” and shoals that remaps our understanding of both the centers of Caribbean colonization, economies, and geopolitics and who the crucial actors were.

What I am most drawn to in Crawford’s narrative is the sense of fluid geographies produced through encounters that cross racial, species, and national lines. Crawford attends to interstitial spaces and “sinew populations” showing how turtle fishing “facilitated the creation and recreation of a dynamic contact zone of ongoing transnational and cross-racial encounters among indigenous, white, and Afro-Caribbean inhabitants” (12). The foundational role of these cross-racial encounters is clear in the early chapters as Crawford discusses the role of Indigenous knowledge and labor in early modern exploration and conquest and early Caymanian economies. Yet in the later chapters, the racialized politics of turtling, and conservation, were less clear to me. I wonder whether nationality became more significant than race or ethnicity for understanding the politics of the turtle fishery in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To what extent did racial and ethnic politics shape twentieth century sea turtle fisheries and conservation?

The fourth chapter presents Crawford’s most powerful argument—that turtlers were central agents of the twentieth century territorial ordering of the “regional nooks” of the Caribbean. Here the turtling shoals are a politically murky waterscape shaped by turtlers’ claims of traditional rights, regional state politics, and the broader geopolitics of British and US empire. As Crawford writes, turtlers “exposed the limits of [...] states’ sovereignty over both their borders and their resources.” This is the story of the disintegration of the “Atlantic commons” that paralleled the increasing scarcity of sea turtle populations. Early in the book, Crawford references Garret Hardin’s tragedy of the commons, noting that many have pushed back against the theory, demonstrating the participation of fishers in regulation of increasingly scarce resources. Caymanian turtlemen were among them, demanding government intervention to help them negotiate access to an increasingly scarce marine resource. Yet I am left uncertain of what Crawford thinks of Hardin—is this a tragedy of the commons story or might the attention to the role of Caymanian turtlers in boundary making reorient our thinking about common pool resources?

The penultimate chapter shifts focus from the Caymanian turtlers to herpetologist Archie Carr’s attempts to scientifically manage dwindling populations of sea turtles. Carr was an exception to conservationist finger-pointing at local communities. He spent considerable time living at the Tortugero rookery in Costa Rica, where he established a tagging program. Indeed, Carr stands out in the long history of naturalists who relied on local expertise by praising turtlemen as “specialists in an exacting fishery” and by working closely with them to monitor sea turtle populations. Carr’s early conservation efforts distinguished turtling for export markets from that for local consumption, which he initially thought could be sustainable, though by the late 1960s he supported an all-out ban on the fishery.

This chapter functions chiefly to mark the end of a centuries-long livelihood strategy. Yet the shift in perspective to Carr means that the experiences and opinions of the book's main characters are submerged. How turtlers weathered the end of the fishery is a secondary focus. Captain Allie Ebanks bookends the chapter—first as a guide for a northern photographer along for a turtle hunt, and later as one of the turtlers who worked with Carr on the tagging program. But how did Caymanian, Costa Rican, Miskitu and other turtlers experience conservation efforts, and what did they think about Carr? What might turtlers' earlier experiences teach us about conservation? Is it only a scientific enterprise?

Crawford concludes by positioning the book among studies of biodiversity loss in the Anthropocene—"clearly another example of the accelerated pace of human-generated biodiversity loss" (149) yet also a story that "offers a glimmer of hope" about the potential for successful resource management. Yet these conclusions seem to me somewhat disconnected from the theoretical interventions framed by Crawford's maritime perspective and foregrounding of the turtlers' labor. She suggests that the story of the Caribbean sea turtle fishery may push us toward rethinking the origins of the Anthropocene in the "Great Acceleration" of the twentieth century. This seems to me an opportunity to draw together conclusions about the environmental implications of turtling with those concerning the construction of Caribbean identities, economies and territories through human-sea turtle interactions. If turtling was central to the conquest of the Caribbean, nourished transatlantic trade, and shaped the modern geographies of the region, what are the implications for how we understand the so-called human age? Finally, if *Last Turtlemen* is an Anthropocene story of extinction, what is the significance of telling that story largely from the perspective of Afro-descendant and Native people who have been marginalized on the global stage? Does it change the way we think about the Anthropocene and how, to paraphrase Rob Nixon, we might all be in it, but not in the same way?

Comments by Karl Offen, Syracuse University

On April 21, 2022, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague issued a ruling in a case between Colombia and Nicaragua over contested waters in the western Caribbean. This was only the latest disagreement between the two countries, and as recently as 2001 Nicaragua had disputed Colombian sovereignty over the islands San Andrés and Providencia – which Nicaragua lost. It is hard not to see Nicaragua's point of view in some of these cases. After all, San Andrés and Providencia are 120 km from mainland Nicaragua and 720 km from mainland Colombia. The residents of those islands up through the early eighteenth century were English-speaking Afro-Creoles, a few whites, and enslaved Africans, with family ties to the Mosquito Shore, the Corn Islands, and the Anglo-Caribbean, and had commercial links to markets in the North Atlantic. An obscure and hasty *Orden Real* from the Spanish king in 1803 had transferred the defensive duties for much of the western Caribbean from the Kingdom of Guatemala to the Viceroy of Nueva Granada because of the latter's greater naval capacity to confront the residents just mentioned. It is this late colonial royal order that forms the legal basis for many decisions affecting the maritime spaces surrounding these islands that might suggest a more commonsense political geography (see map 4.1, p. 90).¹ In this particular case, the ICJ supported Nicaragua's claims. By authorizing fishing in Nicaragua's exclusive economic zone, the court ruled, Colombia had violated Nicaragua's "sovereign rights and jurisdiction in this maritime zone."² It should not be surprising to learn that Nicaragua has cases pending before the ICJ over maritime disputes with Honduras, Costa Rica, and other unresolved claims against Colombia, as do other Caribbean rimland countries with some of their neighbors. In short, the maritime spaces described by Sharika Crawford in her poignant book *The Last Turtlemen* remain fluid and contested. And though the disputes are ostensibly about sovereignty and rights, Crawford's work reminds us they are also about considerably more.

The Last Turtlemen tells the story of turtle men from the Cayman Islands who pursued the world's most historically significant marine reptile. Although the book describes the hunting of both the green sea turtle, taken for its meat and calipee, and the hawksbill sea turtle, taken for its translucent scutes known as tortoiseshell, the book mostly focuses on the former. In so doing, Crawford is standing on the shoulders of giants, especially Archie Carr, James Parsons, and I would add Bernard Nietschmann. As these authors show, and Crawford's work confirms, without the wide availability of the nutritious and prodigious green sea turtle, early colonial history of the

¹ For conflicting views on this topic see Enrique Gaviria Liévano, *Nuestro archipiélago de San Andrés y la Mosquitia colombiana* (Bogotá: Academia Colombiana de Historia, 1984) and Augusto Zamora R., *Intereses Territoriales de Nicaragua: San Andrés y Providencia, Cayos, Golfo de Fonseca, Río San Juan* (Managua: Editorial de la Jurídico, 1995).

² International Court of Justice (ICJ), Press Release, 21 April 2022 <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/155/155-20220421-PRE-01-00-EN.pdf> (last accessed May 10, 2022).

Caribbean would have been very different.³ Crawford describes the lives of Caymanian turtle hunters from the post-abolition period until the demise of the commercial economy in the 1970s. She sets up her study with a succinct and balanced overview of the human history and marine ecology of the two aquatic reptiles. Crawford shows how early Caribbean knowledge of sea turtle feeding, nesting, and migration patterns provided masterless men and women the opportunity to eke out a living in liminal spaces on the margins of Spanish and British colonial rule.

In the second chapter, Crawford uses recorded and transcribed testimony from multiple generations of the last Caymanian turtlemen held at the Cayman Islands National Archive. Indeed, readers would benefit from hearing more about this incredible resource, the vision of its originators, who spoke with the turtlemen, what questions they asked them, how the archive has been used by others, and what today's Caymanians make of this important national treasure. Crawford's ability to draw on the voices and turtling experiences of people who in most cases are no longer living gives the study an ethnographic quality that allows her to transport readers to the sailing schooners, salty catboats, and sandy cays which formed the laboring sites of the turtlemen. We also follow the turtlemen to the Florida Keys where they sold their harvest to American canneries after World War I disrupted their prior trade with Great Britain. But her book is more than an evocative narrative. Crawford illustrates how two centuries of overfishing in the turtle commons of Caymanian waters and the demise of Caymanian nesting sites required turtlemen to innovate new technologies and techniques to pursue their quarries in more distant waters. She also explains how new forms of capitalization and credit provided the necessary conditions to retain profitability. Crawford informs us how profits worked their way up from the laboring turtlemen to the boat owners, to the credit providers, to the canning companies, and to the retailers of turtle end products. She also explains how task-work as opposed to wages privileged those with capital by pushing the economic risk of poor harvests and climatic disasters upon the turtlers. Crawford's subtle blending of human experience with economic factors in this chapter reminds us that though the life of a commercial turtler may have been a free one, it was most definitely not carefree or lucrative.

Covering the transformational period of the western Caribbean from the 1850s to the 1940s, Chapter Three describes the transnational migratory networks established by the movement of hundreds of thousands of men and women among the Caribbean islands and the rimland of Central America in pursuit of livelihoods and new opportunities. Such mobility among Black and Afro-descended populations occurred

³ Crawford references the pioneering work by these scholars, and several others, but among Nietschmann's works not cited I would highlight: Bernard Nietschmann, "Ecological Change, Inflation, and Migration in the Far Western Caribbean," *The Geographical Review* 69, no. 1 (1979): 1-24; Bernard Nietschmann, "When the Turtle Collapses, the World Ends," *Natural History Magazine*, no. June/July (1974): 34-43, reprinted along with other relevant essays in Bernard Nietschmann, *Caribbean Edge: The Coming of Modern Times to Isolated People and Wildlife* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1979). See also, Karl Offen, "Subsidio de la naturaleza: Las tortugas verdes en el Gran Caribe colonial," *Mesoamérica* 60/61 (2019): in press.

at a historical moment when such freedom of movement had not been possible for most in the first half of nineteenth century, and would not be possible again in the second half of the twentieth century. As with the work of Ernesto Bassi and Kevin Dawson, Crawford shows how Afro-descended populations pursued and created the interstitial spaces of the Caribbean through their movements and networks, and how islands constituted interconnected nodes of kinship and commerce that were linked by sail and sea.⁴ Central to this chapter is the shared maritime knowledge systems that emerged across the western Caribbean. These systems included the use of nets in turtle hunting, and the adoption of more maneuverable, shorter and wider catboats, both of which spread with the movement of Caymanian turtlers.⁵ Overall, this chapter provides an important corrective to the many national histories that discount the mobile and borderless histories of the transimperial Caribbean. At this point in the reading, I wanted to know how a greater focus on women might have provided additional context to the lives of turtlemen. Man does not live by turtles alone, nor do women when their men are away for months at a time. What role did the turtleman's household play in sustaining their seasonal livelihoods?

State-led enclosures of the turtle commons constitute the main subject of Chapter Four. Here Crawford explores the various conflicts that Caymanian turtlers had with newly aggressive states seeking to assert sovereignty over their coastal marine spaces. The whole story takes place in the context of the United States playing a greater role in the region as it sought to consolidate its agreements to build a trans-isthmian canal, first through Nicaragua and then Panama. The political and maritime geography of the western Caribbean had never been benign, but with new and older powers vying for influence the political stakes heated up in the late nineteenth century. This chapter may have been the most challenging to write because it involved contextualizing Caymanian green turtle conflicts, first with Cuban officials off their southern cays, and then with Nicaraguan officials at the Miskito Cays, and then between hawksbill turtlers from Cayman Brac and Colombian officials for access to the southern reefs. For the case of the Miskito Cays, I ask the author to consider what a more Miskitu Indian-centric point of view of Caymanian turtling around the Cays might reveal that a state and diplomatic focus backed by the testimony of aggrieved Caymanians does not. Given that the Miskitu had been turtling at the cays – whose very name is entangled with their own – since time immemorial, it is difficult to accept at face value claims by Caymanians that they “had originally settled and developed Mosquito Cay for commerce,” presumably in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, and that they “rarely saw Miskitu Indians from Mosquitia” fishing there (p.

⁴ Ernesto Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Kevin Dawson, *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2018).

⁵ William Dampier suggests that by the second half of the eighteenth century, turtlers from Jamaica – whose racialized identity he does not mention – used nets to catch green turtles at their sleeping shoals in the waters of southern Cuba. William Dampier, *A new voyage round the world. Describing particularly, the isthmus of America, several coasts and islands in the West Indies ...* (London: James Knapton, 1697), 106.

91).⁶ A second question, triggered at multiple times in my reading, but especially in Chapter Four, concerns the role of British colonialism in this study. Specifically, how important is it to the study and the maritime conflicts described at the turn of the twentieth century and beyond, that Caymanian turtlemen were British subjects, governed by colonial officials in Jamaica, and who had the full-backing and resources of the British empire at their disposal? I'm thinking broadly here, but specifically in the ways that Nicaraguan, Colombian, Costa Rican officials responded to British diplomatic efforts on behalf of the Caymanian turtlemen.

The last chapter of the book covers the rise of turtle conservation in the wake of declining populations, fewer rookeries, and changing global attitudes toward charismatic megafauna, including sea turtles. Crawford justly highlights the role of the herpetologist, Archie Carr, his prolific writings – both scientific and with those with broad popular appeal – and his enigmatic personality that provided him access to government officials around the Caribbean – it is impossible to imagine any gringo scientist having this much political sway today. Crawford also does a fantastic job showing how Carr first rejected and then accepted the accumulated knowledge of the turtlemen he interacted with. Carr was seeking out, accepting, and eventually crediting traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) of turtlemen before TEK was an acronym and conservation buzzword.⁷

Crawford's skillfully conceived book shows the power of a transnational history to illustrate the causes and consequences of truly open access commons (as opposed to a socially managed commons), elastic market demands for predictable wildlife, and the human and cultural costs associated with rapid restrictions due to conservation. As Crawford knows, this story is actually ongoing. The Caymanians were only the last *commercial* turtlemen. Throughout the 1990s, "the Turtle People" of Nicaragua (mostly Miskitu) harvested 10,000 to 12,000 green turtles per year for local consumption, numbers that some turtle scientists consider comparable to their export levels of the 1960s and 1970s. These same scientists find that the turtle people of Nicaragua are harvesting between 5,000 and 8,000 animals per year in the twenty-first century, which they argue reflects reduced catch rates and shrinking supplies.⁸ Perhaps it is time to rethink breeding programs, marine commons, and to resurrect Archie Carr's goal of re-establishing turtle rookeries. Whatever the solutions are, Crawford's important book should be part of the discussion.

⁶ The Miskitu had been hunting green sea turtles at the Mosquito Cays long before Puritan colonists from England described them doing so during their efforts to settle Providence Island (1629-1641); see Karl Offen, "Puritan Bioprospecting in the West Indies and Central America," *Itinerario* 35, no. 1 (April 2011): 15-47 (especially pp. 31-32).

⁷ Alison Rieser, *The Case of the Green Turtle: An Uncensored History of a Conservation Icon* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

⁸ Cynthia J. Lagueux and Cathi L. Campbell, "Caught In a Net: Green Turtles and the Turtle People of Nicaragua," State of the World's Sea Turtles Report 11, February 1, 2016. <https://www.seaturtlestatus.org/articles/2019/1/6/caught-in-a-net-green-turtles-and-the-turtle-people-of-nicaragua> (last accessed May 11, 2022).

Comments by Russell Fielding, Coastal Carolina University

Sharika Crawford undertook a real challenge writing *The Last Turtlemen* the way that she did—and succeeded magnificently. Her challenge was to take on a topic that has seen a major ethical shift in public opinion in recent decades and to consider it in its historical context, not from a “what can we learn from our past environmental sins?” perspective, nor even from a “look how far we’ve come!” point of view, but objectively, scholarly, and without judgement of her subjects. The topic, of course, is turtling—the capture and killing of sea turtles mainly for their meat, which was served as steaks or processed into soup, and enthusiastically consumed throughout North America, Europe, and Asia; and their shells, which provided the raw materials for the production of trinkets such as combs, mirrors, and spectacle frames. Few of Crawford’s readers would countenance turtling today and the book’s main human characters—at least until the environmentalists come onto the scene—may not recruit an unambiguously sympathetic readership. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature lists no sea turtle species with a better conservation status than “vulnerable,” and this fact has embedded itself into today’s public environmental consciousness. Using plastic straws is, in many places, an environmentalist *faux pas* and conservationists working to protect terrestrial tortoises or aquatic terrapins often complain that sea turtles get all the attention, and thus, the funding. Saving sea turtles is a major environmental initiative in the twenty-first century and it would be all too easy to carry that modern perspective into a historical volume narrating a past when things were much different.

But Crawford approaches her subjects, the so-called Turtlemen, in context. Perhaps it is the inclusion of the phrase, “The Last,” that gives the conservation-minded reader comfort—we know, right from the title, that the end is coming—but the author does not hasten that end. Rather, she presents the history of Caribbean turtling, with a focus on turtlemen based in the Cayman Islands who mainly worked the small islands and cays off the Caribbean coast of Central America—Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. Perhaps taking a page out of journalist John McPhee’s guidebook, Crawford starts her narrative not at the beginning, nor at the end, but at a point somewhere in-between.⁹ Crawford’s narrative begins in 1966, when turtling was being modernized and a few holdouts—like the book’s major character Captain Cadie—were still sailing wind-driven schooners. As readers, we sail with Cadie throughout much of the book’s introduction, searching for turtling “grounds” both productive and legally-accessible before being introduced to a fellow voyager: Archie Carr, the late University of Florida professor of zoology who was among the first to recognize the need to direct conservation efforts toward Caribbean sea turtles. As such, the introduction subtly introduces the two major themes that the book will explore: the definitions of space, particularly in coastal, marine, and insular environments; and the evolution of human-nature relationships. These are fitting

⁹ John McPhee, *Draft No. 4: On the Writing Process*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2017.

themes for a historian to consider and the result will be—and is—all the more effective if the task is approached interdisciplinarily.

The best way to describe Crawford's particular approach to interdisciplinarity may be something along the lines of "history-and." Chapter 1 is history-and-biology, chapter 2 history-and-labor-economics. In chapter 3 our reading takes us through the merger of history-and-human-migration (and the migration of human ideas); chapter 4 is history-and-political-geography. Finally, chapter 5 is history-and-conservation-ecology. Crawford even integrates poetry and literary fiction, citing shanties, using Peter Matthiessen's *Far Tortuga*—a novel based upon Matthiessen's own experiences aboard a Caymanian turtling vessel—as a serious source, and acknowledging the turtling behind the scenes in Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*.¹⁰

Chapter 1 introduces the book's nonhuman subject: the sea turtle. Six species are found in Caribbean waters and nesting upon Caribbean shores: green (*Chelonia mydas*), hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*), leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), and olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*). Here we find a summary of sea turtle biology useful to the book's purposes but insufficient as stand-alone biological science. Some facts will be revised upon broader reading: such as Crawford's statement that turtles, tortoises, and terrapins share a genus (they actually diverge within the order *Testudines*) and her statement that turtles' aquatic life makes them "unlike other reptilians" (neglecting crocodilians, marine iguanas, and sea snakes among others; p.20). These oversights do not meaningfully detract from the lessons provided in chapter 1, however, and the reader finishes the chapter knowing enough about sea turtles to embark upon the narrative that is to come: the history of human-turtle interactions in the Caribbean. We learn, for example, why hawksbill turtles were "arguably the most marketable" (p.21) of all the species taken in the Caribbean, yet rarely used as food for humans: toxic meat, beautiful shells. Green sea turtles, on the other hand, were "the most desired of all the turtle species" (p.23) in terms of food production. This chapter also introduces indigenous turtling—a major source of food for precolonial Caribbean peoples. Indeed, it was through contact with indigenous turtlemen that the first Europeans in the region learned how, where, and why to hunt turtles.

The progression of turtling from indigenous subsistence livelihood to colonial capitalist venture is charted in chapter 2. Here, Crawford reminds us of a time when the Caribbean region was not imagined to be all cruise ships and resorts, nor even all sugar plantations. Like a few other "marginal colonies," the Cayman Islands were never developed as sugar islands and "there were few alternative forms of livelihood available to Caymanian men" beyond turtling (p.44). Showing a resourcefulness in direct opposition to the British assumption of an "entire absence of any initiative or enterprise on the part of the inhabitants," Caymanians developed the tools and

¹⁰ Peter Matthiessen, *Far Tortuga: A Novel*. New York: Random House, 1975; Ernest Hemingway, *Old Man and the Sea*. New York: Scribner, 1952.

methods of an early-modern turtling industry, navigating to the productive islets and cays off Central America, launching so-called catboats from schooners, and setting nets to trap passing turtles (p.45). Here, Crawford introduces several individuals involved in the industry, humanizing the story through anecdotes from their diaries and quotes in their own vernacular. The economics of turtling are discussed as the micro- level—aboard the schooner, profits were shared among the crew based upon their labor—and in terms of a broader, macro- scale in which global economic change incentivized longer voyages and the delivery of live turtles to market. During the twentieth century, the consumption of turtle products, especially soup, expanded beyond the elite, which led to more intensive turtling in order to supply new markets.

Turtling expanded until it began to encounter new limits. Chapter 3 documents the diffusion of people and ideas throughout the western Caribbean and beyond following emancipation (in the British-held islands) in 1833. Caymanian turtlemen settled—some full-time, others only during the season—on beaches and islands nearer the turtling grounds. They brought with them the knowledge of their own particular way of turtling, itself having integrated indigenous knowledge with contemporary seafaring, and introduced Caymanian methods to the Miskito Cays, the shores of Costa Rica, and the islands of Providencia and San Andrés. Soon, before the end of the nineteenth century, this expansion encountered a modernizing maritime political geography that Crawford describes in chapter 4 as “the closing of the turtle commons” (p.85). Emerging political states such as Nicaragua and Cuba began to assert their sovereignty over their offshore cays and reefs, along with the adjacent coastal waters. This led to the conceptualization of foreign turtlemen as “sea robbers” and “thieves of the sea” for their exploitation of what was coming to be seen as another nation’s exclusive rights to local natural resources (pp.85-86). At first, turtlemen excused that this newly-defined poaching out of necessity: “it is either that or starve,” a particular Caymanian customs agent argued (p.106). But over time, turtlemen would have to adapt to the new political geographies of the Caribbean.

The spirit of adaptation would be tested again as the environmental movement took hold of public consciousness during the mid-twentieth century. Chapter 5 discusses the tension between turtling and conservation, especially as sea turtles have emerged as one of the most charismatic forms of megafauna. Here, Crawford benefits from the work of several other writers—journalists, mainly, but also the novelist Peter Matthiessen—who set out to document the decline of Caribbean turtling as it happened. Conversations between turtling captains and these observers are especially illuminating of the ecological changes underway at the time. After a large catch, which might be seen as an example of overharvesting, a captain reminded his onboard journalist not to “let this give you the wrong impression,” and added that the bounty would be balanced by “days when we only catch six or seven” (p.117). Conversely, another captain explained small catch not as a sign of turtle population decline, but instead “he chalked it up to timing,” noting that the voyage was occurring after the productive mating season (p.117). To carry her points about turtle conservation, Crawford concludes the book’s final chapter with a miniature professional biography of zoologist Archie Carr, among the first scientists to focus

upon sea turtles from the perspective of conservation biology. Carr was active throughout the 1950s and 1960s and was an early adopter of traditional ecological knowledge, or TEK, as a supplement to data derived from scientific experiment and observation. The transition from turtling to turtle conservation took place remarkably quickly as Carr and other scientists produced evidence that the severe declines in turtle populations resulted directly from overhunting.

The Last Turtlemen leaves its readers with hope for the future, inspired by scientifically-informed conservation efforts and a concern for sea turtles endemic to the Caribbean region where they have been an intrinsic part of human life for centuries. The book casts turtlemen not as enemies, but as one part of an integrated social-environmental system that has always been in flux. Crawford gives perhaps no better example of the turtlemen's adaptation than the statement, made almost in passing at the conclusion of chapter 5, that Allie Ebanks, captain of one of the most productive crews of Caymanian turtlemen, "dutifully assisted Archie Carr in his turtle science research" (p.142). That the findings of this research would bring about the demise of Caribbean turtling is an especially poignant reminder of the human capacity to put aside human needs for the sake of another species, a capacity that Crawford argues convincingly should be viewed as central to the story of the last turtlemen of the Caribbean.

Comments by Mary Draper, Midwestern State University

Most often, environmental histories of the Caribbean center sugar. Yet, Sharika Crawford's *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean* centers the sea and its bounty. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the turtlemen of the Cayman Islands fanned out from their homes in search of sea turtles to capture and sell. They cruised sea lanes to the far reaches of the western Caribbean, combing the waters and shorelines of islands across the region. Their pursuit of turtles took them to places that rarely factor into histories of the Caribbean: smaller, often coastal islands with few inhabitants and ample resources. For these men, the Miskito Cays, San Andrés Island, and Providencia Island—all located off the coast of Central America—were among the most important, profitable places in the circum-Caribbean. There, they could capture hawksbill and green sea turtles and store them in kraals until they returned to the Caymans. In charting this diaspora of Caymanian turtlemen, Crawford shows how their actions in these liminal locales raise big questions about the fate of the commons, the nature of maritime sovereignty, and the limits of sustainability in the modern Caribbean.

For historians of the early modern Caribbean, Crawford provides a sequel to Michael Jarvis's study of the Atlantic commons.¹¹ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Bermudians fanned out across the circum-Caribbean to harvest resources and salvage wrecks in relatively obscure, lesser-settled sites, including the Cayman Islands. These sites, Jarvis argues, were "extranational maritime places that were either unclaimed or contested (on land) or unclaimable (the sea)."¹² Yet, by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the geography, demography, and sovereignty of the commons had changed. Crawford skillfully charts these changes. For one, the Cayman Islands could no longer be categorized as unclaimed or contested. Therefore, those hoping to exploit the commons looked elsewhere in the region—often to the coast of Central America. Moreover, Caymanians joined the ranks of those harvesting the commons as they hunted turtles. Finally, the very places that Caymanians categorized as commons were often claimed by others. The ongoing presence of Caymanian turtlemen on these islands—and in their adjacent waterscapes—prompted conflict and precipitated boundary disputes between turtlemen and foreign governments. The commons, it seems, were not so common, after all.

For Caymanians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Atlantic commons shifted as turtle populations waxed and waned and governments asserted control over their maritime borders. Crawford chronicles how turtlemen responded to a decline in local turtle populations—a result of overhunting—by embarking on long-distance voyages. Initially, these hunts took them to nearby haunts, such as the southern cays of Cuba. These small islands had been frequented by turtlemen from the British empire since the seventeenth century. Yet, in 1871, Cuban authorities

¹¹ Michael J. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), especially 185-256.

¹² Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 256.

prevented British subjects from harvesting marine resources in Cuban waters. Caymanians, then, turned south. They sailed up to 350 miles to the coast of Central America. There, small coastal islands became hubs of turtle hunting. Although these islands were claimed by other powers, Caymanians frequented their coastal waters and shorelines. In doing so, they asserted their rights to harvest marine resources in these liminal spaces.

Soon, these turtlemen found themselves in the middle of international maritime disputes. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century, the governments of Nicaragua and Colombia sought to assert their authority over these maritime spaces. These disputes, Crawford argues, “reveal the messy multilateral process of maritime boundary making”—a process that “helped to consolidate a once porous but contested space” (85). In Nicaragua, the government created and enforced legislation over the Miskito Cays beginning in the 1880s. Crawford shows how individual turtlemen became embroiled in international conflict as both Nicaraguan and British authorities attempted to secure control over these coastal islands. During one particular episode in 1904, Caymanian turtlemen accused Nicaraguan authorities of brutal attacks. For British authorities, the incident violated the freedom of the seas. Moreover, it challenged long-standing British claims to these islands since Caymanian turtlemen “alone claimed to have occupied, developed, and harvested resources from and near them” (98). Similar disputes erupted in the Colombian archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia Islands. There, in the 1920s, Caymanian turtlemen repeatedly defied stern warnings from Colombian officials against hunting on the islands. In all of these incidents, Caymanian turtlemen “challenged attempts to restrict or nationalize the sea and maritime resources” (114-115). Their quest for turtles was also a quest for sovereignty.

Crawford argues that these ongoing disputes rested on one question: were the Caymanian turtlemen hunting in national waters—whether Nicaraguan, Colombian, or Costa Rican—or were they hunting in the high seas? For Caymanian turtlemen, the answer to this question had devastating effects. It led to the closing of the turtle commons in the first half of the twentieth century in the wake of increased regulations. Yet, in addition to a lasting legacy, this question also has a long history, especially if you replace “national” with “imperial.” Debates over maritime access and control animate centuries of Caribbean history. Indeed, so many of the stories that Crawford recovers from the 1880s could—and did—take place in the 1680s. During that decade, British subjects from Jamaica chased turtles throughout the Caribbean and repeatedly clashed with Spanish subjects. In response, they pleaded with imperial officials to protect their access to these turtling haunts. Consequently, historians of the early modern Caribbean would benefit immensely from Crawford’s book, as it reveals how familiar disputes—whether over access to the so-called commons, control of marine and coastal resources, or debates over imperial sovereignty—continued well into the twentieth century.

Notably absent from *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean* is engagement with the idea of political ecology. Despite the phrase’s prominence in recent environmental

histories, Crawford never uses it in her discussion of these turtlemen.¹³ Yet, she evokes the concept throughout her work. In tracking how Caymanian turtlemen shifted their hunting patterns away from their traditional commons to new areas along the Central American coast, she charts how these hunters championed a political ecology that enabled them to harvest marine resources across porous boundaries in sparsely-settled islands. In the eyes of Caymanian turtlemen, then, the Atlantic commons existed only when resources remained to be harvested and no one—in particular, no government—questioned their presence. In the midst of increased legislation, however, areas that the Caymanians considered commons became more difficult to hunt and defend. Nevertheless, these turtlemen repeatedly asserted their rights to fish in these distant waters and claim turtles along their shorelines—and British authorities tried to support their claims. This vision of political ecology therefore viewed the sea as a common resource and prioritized personal profit over notions of foreign territorial—or maritime—sovereignty. Moreover, it protected the hunter and not the hunted.

In charting this political ecology, Crawford raises interesting questions about the nature of sustainability in the modern Caribbean. Crawford reconstructs competing ideas of sustainability practiced by Caymanian turtlemen and Floridian herpetologist Archie Carr. For the turtlemen, sustainability meant the ability to continue hunting. They wanted their practice—and livelihood—to continue in the wake of population decline. These turtlemen adapted to this decline by developing new technologies, such as catboats equipped to undertake long-distance hunts. Yet, for Archie Carr, sustainability meant the restoration of sea turtle populations. Beginning in the 1950s, he led a successful international campaign to protect sea turtles. One wonders, though, if Caymanian turtlemen had other notions of sustainability or resource management. Crawford shows how Caymanian turtlemen understood their actions had ecological consequences. But did they have any sense of how to address these consequences, other than by embarking on long distance hunts? At various points, Crawford alludes to early efforts toward sustainability and conservation. In 1741, for example, Jamaican authorities passed a law that prohibited the destruction of turtle eggs (36). This law suggests that there was some understanding of the consequences of turtle hunting in the eighteenth century. Where did this understanding go in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Is there another, more local story to tell—one in which turtlemen and Caymanian authorities attempted to address the decline in population along their shorelines through laws and other actions while also pursuing turtles elsewhere in the Caribbean? Further exploring this tension between Caymanians' local and regional approaches to sustainability would make Crawford's analysis even more interesting.¹⁴

¹³ For recent scholarship that draws on this concept in the early modern Caribbean, see Molly Warsh, *American Baroque: Pearls and the Nature of Empire, 1492-1700* (Chapel Hill: university of North Carolina Press, 20118).

¹⁴ Keith Pluymers explores a similar tension in the context of timber and the English Atlantic world. In *No Wood, No Kingdom: Political Ecology in the English Atlantic*, Pluymers shows how local ideas of sustainability intersected with—and sometimes competed with or challenged—broader ideas within imperial political ecologies.

Above all, Crawford reminds us that small islands tell big stories. Whereas most histories of the Caribbean tend to focus on large islands, smaller islands—whether lying just offshore larger islands such as Cuba’s southern cays or hugging continental coastlines like Nicaragua’s Miskito Cays—were also the sites of imperial and national contests that generated vital wealth and prompted transnational debates. By centering these islands, their surrounding waterscapes, and the turtlemen that frequented them, Crawford tells an urgent story that is as pertinent to those concerned about present-day conservation efforts as it is to historians of the modern and early modern Caribbean. The actions of turtlemen as well as those of turtles have shaped the Caribbean for centuries, and Crawford shows how they continue to shape the region—especially its maritime boundaries—today.

Response by Sharika D. Crawford, United States Naval Academy

Never did I imagine that I would write a book about turtles and the men who hunted them. It is an aspect of Caribbean culture and history which has not received tremendous attention from scholars of the region. When I began my research, I came there with a narrow research agenda and doggedly pursued it at the expense of processing what I observed and heard from the people with whom I sought to write their history. For example, while working on my dissertation, I stayed with a San Andrés island woman who kindly offered me a homecooked turtle dish. She had prepared it for her son living in Texas, explaining how it was his favorite meal. I must admit that I was taken aback by her son's preferred choice of animal protein. At the time, I took no interest in how she came to acquire a turtle or learn whether it was a widely consumed animal on the island. My interest in turtles came along much later. It took me a decade to deconstruct this impromptu exchange and uncover the history of turtles and turtling on these small islands. Now, I am humbled by this opportunity to engage with the thoughtful reviews of my book *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean: Waterscapes of Labor, Conservation, and Boundary Making* from four esteemed scholars within the interdisciplinary field of marine environmental history. I owe a nod of appreciation to Kara Schlichting, who graciously invited me to participate in an author roundtable, and to the four reviewers for such thought-provoking commentary and feedback.

In many ways, *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean* reflects my training as a social historian seeking to write the history of the men who hunted turtles and how they affected regional geopolitics and the region's ecology. In the book, I aim to reconstruct as closely as possible the turtlemen's world and lived experiences from multiple sources, including a collection of oral histories. I also offer observations on the broader consequences of turtling's political ecology, borrowing the terminology introduced by Mary Draper in her review. In short, I insist that turtle hunting was as fundamental in shaping coastal settlements and small islands like the Cayman Islands as were tropical commodities such as sugar or bananas to other parts of the region. Men hunted turtles and women cultivated ground provisions or made thatch-rope to barter in exchange for goods when their fathers, spouses, brothers, and sons embarked on turtling voyages. This niche industry had geopolitical ramifications, too. Spanish-speaking states in the circum-Caribbean came to assert greater authority over maritime territories and marine resources due to the expanding encroachment of Caymanian turtlemen who hunted sea turtles in waters far beyond their homes. As the four reviews demonstrate, *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean* raises additional environmental, geopolitical, and sociocultural questions.

Revisiting Conservation and the Tragedy of the Commons

Inevitably, any history about resource extraction must confront the allure of telling a declensionist narrative, a story of decline. *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean* does not break fully from this well-established pattern in environmental history. If it is a

story of decline, however, it is not fixated exclusively on the decline of the green and hawksbill turtles but rather on the decline of a way of life for Caymanian turtle hunters. By centering my account on the lives of the people who hunted and consumed sea turtles, I counterbalance historical narratives that trace how human actions destroyed non-human animals or the environment with one that recounts, with some empathy, turtlemen's difficult choices and the consequences of them. This happens in various moments in the book but most powerfully in my examination of the rise of sea turtle conservationism in the 1950s.

In the last chapter, I turn my attention to the work of Archie Carr, a Floridian herpetologist, who conducted research in one of the Caribbean's largest nesting grounds along the northern littoral of Costa Rica. To repopulate the region's stock in green turtles, Carr worked with biologists and locals in the Tortuguero community to tag turtles and protect their eggs from human and non-human animal predators. Carr and his research team even went so far as to ship out turtle hatchlings to other parts of the Caribbean. His goals were three-fold. He sought to learn more about the migratory patterns of sea turtles but he also hoped that these hatchlings might survive into adulthood and return to beaches across the region to boost turtle populations. That program relied on the traditional turtling knowledge of Caymanian captains of turtling vessels and local turtlemen around the region who regularly captured these turtles and sent back the tags in exchange for a fee. While they were incentivized by a small monetary reward, the veteran Caymanian sea captains like Allie O. Ebanks understood that a rebound in the turtle population meant the survival of the turtling industry. Yet the development of such collaboration and institution building did not mitigate the tragedy of the turtling commons since Carr was unsuccessful in marshalling support from the government of Nicaragua who encouraged its Miskitu citizens, arguably the oldest turtlemen in the circum-Caribbean, to pick up commercial turtling in the 1970s. Cultural geographer Bernard Nietschmann documented this transition from subsistence to commercial turtle hunting in his ethnographic work in the Tasbapauni community.¹⁵ Eventually, Carr abandoned his strategy to build community partners to maintain a pool of turtles as a common resource. He advocated to institute an international ban on the importation of sea turtles in key markets like the United States. So far, this strategy has shown promising results in terms of growing sea turtle populations in the Caribbean.

The reviewers also wondered about conservation practices from indigenous communities such as the Miskitu or other turtlemen in the region. It is not entirely clear how to identify past conservation practices. Indigenous turtlemen valued and consumed turtles differently. For instance, Miskitu turtlemen were artisanal hunters, and turtles were an animal protein that made up the backbone of their subsistence. Men hunted turtles to bring back to their families and entire communities. Nietschmann explained how the procuring of turtle meat was a mutually shared

¹⁵ Bernard Nietschmann, *Between Land and Water: The Subsistence Ecology of the Miskito Indians, Eastern Nicaragua* (New York: Seminar Press, 1973).

obligation ensuring that all community members, regardless of their status, health, or ability to hunt, received meat to eat. We should note that the Miskitu were not hunting commercially. They captured far fewer turtles than commercial hunters. When turtles became scarce, they acted. In the 1840s, C. Napier Bell, the son of a British trader who grew up around the Miskitu communities in eastern Nicaragua, spoke about the Miskitu king instituting a turtle tax on non-Miskitu turtle hunters. Whether the king demanded a tax payment to conserve turtle populations, to raise revenue, or both, it could have been one of a series of strategies meant to prevent the depletion of sea turtles for dependent Miskitu communities.

As a result, it is difficult to distinguish the state-directed regulation of turtle hunting from conservation strategies. Caymanian hunters pushed Costa Rican authorities to regulate turtle hunting. In 1890, Caymanian turtlemen complained to the governor of Jamaica how impregnated sea turtles were captured in astonishing numbers as they came on the beach to deposit their eggs. They called on British authorities in Jamaica government to assist them in pushing the Costa Rican government to enforce a close hunting season or “feared their [turtles] extermination in the Caribbean Sea.”¹⁶ Costa Ricans challenged such recriminations from Caymanian hunters insisting that their government took actions to minimize the threat to sea turtles. While it is clear that they enacted legislation later to regulate it, Costa Rican authorities appeared to lease public beaches in and around Tortuguero as a way to raise revenue rather than to protect sea turtles in the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Thus, it was not entirely clear to me whether the Miskitu or even the Afro-Caribbean populations along the Caribbean littoral of Nicaragua and Costa Rica had adopted effective strategies to conserve sea turtle populations.

Statehood and Disputes over Turtle Hunting Grounds

The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean's key argument is that turtling helped to shape maritime boundaries as numerous Spanish-speaking governments in the circum-Caribbean asserted control not only over the land and people but the resources in and around them in the sea. In doing so, they drew Caymanian turtlemen into disputes over their demands to access “national waters” to hunt sea turtles. Caymanian turtle hunters became adept at bringing in various levels of the British government to defend their access claims vis-à-vis the Nicaraguan, Costa Rican, or Colombian governments. British subjecthood had perks and others noticed it, too. In 1911, the Jamaican newspaper *The Gleaner* reported a story about Costa Rican authorities seizing the vessels and cargo of three turtling captains from the Colombian islands of San Andrés and Providencia who had stopped at Tortuguero to repair their vessel after buying turtles from a local merchant. Authorities detained the captains and their crew in jail, however, for turtle poaching. One of the sea captains, Amiel J. Bent, was only released after the owner of the vessel Elkanor MacNish arrived to pay his bail. *The Gleaner* author noted, “it had been a long old custom for over forty years for

¹⁶ Colonel Sadler, Letter to Ricardo Jimenez, December 19, 1890, United Kingdom National Archives, CO 137/544, Folio 466.

coasting vessels to go to Turtle Bogue [e.g. Tortuguero, Costa Rica] to purchase turtles as also to catch them without molestation, and no notice was given by the government disallowing that custom." More importantly, the newspaper reported how an English vessel, likely from the Cayman Islands though it was not stated, was also seized at the same time but quickly released after the English consul demanded its release. Since Costa Rican authorities had not notified the public about the policy to obtain a permit to acquire sea turtles in advance at Puerto Limón, then it was unfair to seize the Colombian vessel and confiscate the cargo. When MacNish learned of the prompt release of the English vessel, he reprimanded the Costa Rican minister of foreign affairs who told him, "Oh, everybody respects the English government, but no one respects the Colombian Government [sic]."¹⁷ Whether or not the Costa Rican minister said these very words, San Andrés and Providencia Islanders came away viewing their government as doing a poor job defending them and their access to marine resources. After this incident, turtlemen on these islands became more forceful demanding Colombian authorities to take similar actions to regulate access to hunting grounds in nearby waters from nonnationals. A key takeaway in the book is for island and coastal peoples who lived in the periphery of state authority, imperial or national, political affiliation became essential in rousing state support and intervention. It also had the unintended consequences of triggering state enactment of regulations to regulate access to turtle hunting grounds and later mobility in the region, which eventually fragmented supranational or imperial kinship ties.

Subaltern Views of the Anthropocene

Is there something to gain from studying subalterns like the indigenous and Afro-Caribbean turtlemen from small islands and coastal communities in the southwestern Caribbean in my book? Yes, of course. *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean* elucidates how peoples and places far away from metropolitan locales or large commercial centers fed into the commodity chains that have driven global capitalism and negatively affected the environment through marine resource extraction. There is a tendency to include subaltern actors as victims of broader processes. They are often acted upon by enterprising, capitalist outsiders, which is not to say that such situations were uncommon or should not be told and understood. In my book, however, the subaltern were agents of change that brought a range of consequences to them and their way of life. As I implied in my book and said in my response, nationality, more than race or ethnicity, mattered. Moreover, this study is just one contribution to our understanding of resource extraction and ecological change, which can push others to broaden our thinking about the array of human actions that have been in operating within our environment.

¹⁷ "Vessels Seized. Schooner held by Costa Rican government. Captain Imprisoned. English schooner also seized but later on released," *The Gleaner* (Kingston, Jamaica), September 25, 1911.

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