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Catherine McNeur, *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). ISBN: 9780674725096

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Introduction by Christopher F. Jones, Arizona State University

The past, L.P. Hartley famously declared, “is a foreign country; they do things differently there.”¹ This aphorism is highly appropriate for **Catherine McNeur’s** fascinating exploration of antebellum New York City. For most modern observers, Manhattan represents an iconic landscape of densely packed buildings surrounded by paved roads organized in a rectilinear grid. How odd and delightful, then, to read about an era in which dogs and pigs roamed fields now covered by skyscrapers and the city’s numbered streets had yet to be extended across the island. *Taming Manhattan* reminds us that familiar places often contain unfamiliar histories.

Of course, not all was different in antebellum America. Choices about how to regulate the natural environment—which animals to control, where to build parks, whether to ban offal boiling operations within city limits—had human consequences. And in the past as well as the present, while many of the proposed policies were justified using the broad language of the public good, in practice they frequently benefited the wealthy at the expense of the poor. Cleaning the streets of pigs, for example, may have seemed more sanitary, but it undermined the livelihoods of those struggling to make ends meet by removing a vital source of protein or supplemental income. Creating parks may have preserved open space in a rapidly urbanizing area, but wealthier New Yorkers used their influence to have such amenities concentrated in the parts of town they lived in.

A particular strength of *Taming Manhattan* lies in the inclusion of voices from across the economic spectrum. This is not simply a tale of top-down implementation of environmental rulings. Instead, we get details of the lives of poor residents and the approaches they employed to resist (successfully in many cases) efforts led by elites that threatened their subsistence strategies. From Henry Bourden throwing a brick at officers seizing hogs from the Eighth Ward in 1825 to an unnamed German woman threatening a policeman with a large metal cooking pan in 1859, Manhattanites from all different backgrounds used whatever tools were at their disposal to protect their means of survival.

Crafted with graceful prose and keen attention to environmental justice, *Taming Manhattan* is a deserving winner of numerous awards including the 2015 George Perkins Marsh prize from the American Society for Environmental History, the 2014 James Broussard Best First Book Prize from the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic, the 2015 VSNY Book Award from the New York Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, and the 2014 Hornblower Award for a First Book from the New York Society Library.

¹ L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953).

I asked **Clifton Hood** to participate in this roundtable because of his extensive research and teaching experience in the natural, technological, and cultural history of New York City. Author of a history of the city's subway system (*722 Miles*, Simon & Schuster, 1993) and a forthcoming work on New York City's upper class (*In Pursuit of Privilege*, Columbia, 2016), his comments usefully situate *Taming Manhattan* within the city's broader historiography while raising a number of topics for further debate.

A cultural historian of smell and odors in the nineteenth century industrial city, **Melanie Kiechle's** manuscript in process, *Smell Detectives: An Olfactory History of Urban America, 1840-1900*, links bodily knowledge of urban environments to topics including health, waste, and industrialization. Her review draws out important questions about our historical imaginations, the processes by which areas get defined as rural versus urban, and how societies determine the locations in which agriculture is deemed appropriate.

Matthew Gandy is a geographer with wide-ranging interests in urban environments. A prolific scholar, he has written about topics including water infrastructure, roads, pollution, public space, and environmental politics in places such as London, Hamburg, New York City, Mumbai, Paris, and Lagos. His review constructively asks about the feminization of nature, the etymology of gentrification, and how New York City might be compared to other urban environments past and present.

Carl Zimring completes our roundtable, lending his expertise in urban history, environmental waste, and politics. Author of *Cash for Your Trash* (Rutgers, 2005) and the recently released *Clean and White* (NYU, 2015), his research analyzes the dynamics between waste, culture, race, and inequality. His review examines one of the perennial challenges of writing environmental history: the challenges and opportunities of selecting a particular geographic boundary for a study.

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 Clifton Hood, Hobart and William Smith Colleges

Since the publication of Moses Rischin's influential *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914* (1962), urban historians have used social history to tell the stories of migrants and workers in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century New York City. This body of scholarship has produced first-rate works that have vastly improved our understanding of the city and its inhabitants, including Gilbert Osofsky's *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto; Negro New York, 1890-1930* (1966) and Tyler Anbinder's *Five Points: The Nineteenth Century New York Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (2001). In so doing, this work has brought attention to topics like immigration, ethnicity, neighborhoods, and working-class culture that previous generations of patrician and professional historians had ignored or downplayed.

Still, as valuable as these social histories have been, they eventually became formulaic. Many have followed the Rischin model of focusing on a particular neighborhood and specific ethno-racial group and analyzing the struggles its members encountered in socially dynamic and economically exploitative New York City. The emphasis was on social relationships as seen from the perspective of a single social group, with environmental factors like housing and factory conditions relegated to the background and often used to dramatize the narrative. And, for all the weight these historians gave to the residential overcrowding, appalling work conditions, and ethno-racial prejudice, their accounts were generally optimistic: within a generation or two, members of white ethnic groups, at least, significantly improved their lives.

To her immense credit, Catherine McNear takes a fresh approach to the history of the urban growth and social transformation of antebellum New York City. As an environmental historian who regards historical changes as being closely interrelated, McNear adopts a wide framework that lets her examine a very large number of environmental conflicts, over everything from the control of animals to the regulation of food industries and the construction of parks. She also discusses people from virtually all social classes and groups as historical actors.

What unifies this far-ranging account are the struggles that occur as responses to the efforts of elites to control both the urban landscape and the working-class and immigrant peoples who inhabit it. Since elites' overriding goal is to tame an urban landscape and population deemed wild and uncivilized, most of the reforms initiated by the municipal government were designed to advance the stakes of dominant parties, and they end up hurting rather than benefitting the poor. These reforms are for the most part transitory and limited: McNear ends with the New York City draft riots of 1863, which, she concludes, revealed to elite New Yorkers the inadequacy of their previous efforts at managing the urban social environment and the need to find more systematic modes of control via health, tenement, and

other regulations. Unlike the earlier social histories, *Taming Manhattan* is not a success story.

Taming Manhattan consists of an introduction, five chapters, and an epilogue. The chapters are organized thematically and chronologically, with each one examining a specific set of environmental clashes by means of contrasting case studies. Chapter 1 explores battles that took place in the 1810s and thereafter over the presence of free-roaming animals within the city (and over competing meanings of urban and rural). It compares disputes that took place over dogs with much different disputes that occurred over hogs. While people from all social classes opposed the efforts of municipal leaders and reformers to remove dogs, hogs had fewer defenders, and most of them were poorer New Yorkers who relied on swine as a source of inexpensive meat. Yet none of these attempts to improve the condition of city streets and eliminate public health menaces proved to be effective, due to both the weakness of the municipal government and the determined opposition of animal defenders. Chapter 2 scrutinizes the support that the construction of parks and the planting of shade trees received as the rate of population growth increased in the 1820s and 1830s. Far from benefitting all New Yorkers equally, the new parks were primarily located in affluent areas, where, it was hoped, they would lift property values and improve the municipal tax base. Although urban and architectural historians have written a great deal about the nineteenth-century urban parks movement, McNeur sheds new light in two ways. First, she begins her analysis several decades prior to the construction of Central Park, around the time of the passage of the Commissioners' Street Plan of 1811, with a plan to create the ill-fated Grand Parade (which eventually shrunk to become the present-day Madison Square Park) and other smaller parks. Second, she demonstrates that the reliance on special assessments as the principal funding mechanism for parks and other improvements discouraged property-owners from wanting parks to be located in poor neighborhoods. Chapter 3 scrutinizes the sanitation problems of antebellum New York City through an investigation of the failure of public regulation of enterprises that took part in the urban-rural recycling of street sweepings and animal wastes, on the one hand, and human waste, on the other hand. These industries came under tremendous pressure as a result of the cholera epidemics of 1833 and 1849.

In chapter 4, McNeur turns her attention to food production and food waste, largely in the 1840s and 1850s. In another example of urban-rural recycling that also entailed rampant political corruption, private companies obtained contracts for disposing of offal (the remnants of animals slaughtered for food) and opened bone-boiling and fat-rendering establishments on the outskirts of Manhattan and in nearby areas in Queens County and Jamaica Bay, while distillers built cow stables near their factories in order to use the swill that was the by-product of their manufacturing process as cheap food for milk cows, saving the price of more expensive nourishments like hay and oats and converting a waste product into milk and meat. Swill was anything but nutritious but it helped satisfy a booming urban market for milk – and, in the days prior to mechanical refrigeration when dairy farms needed to be located close to their markets, it allowed farms near New York

City to produce crops that had more value than animal feed did. Chapter 4 also discusses the so-called Piggery War of 1859, when city officials who were loath to interfere with the politically connected offal companies and distilleries showed no similar reluctance in seeking to eradicate the penned pigs that constituted a major food source for the poor. Chapter 5 explores battles that took place in the 1850s over the preservation of public space by examining the reform efforts of Charles Loring Brace, the head of the Children's Aid Society, and Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect who helped create Central Park.

What distinguishes this chapter – and ties Brace and Olmsted together – is the extended analysis the author provides of the shantytowns that existed on the fringes of antebellum New York. The section on shantytowns covers less than ten pages but is one of the strongest parts of book. Here McNeur builds on and greatly extends the insights that Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar made in their *The Park and The People: A History of Central Park* (1992) about an African-American shantytown named Seneca Village that was demolished during the construction of Central Park. Moreover, in identifying shantytowns as “suburbs,” McNeur challenges the older and still standard interpretations of nineteenth-century American suburbs by scholars like Kenneth T. Jackson and Robert Fishman that stress their elite character. Her revisions are consistent with the more recent work on twentieth-century American suburbs that emphasizes their class, ethnic, and racial diversity and help push that newer scholarship back into the nineteenth century.² There is no reason why we should not conceive of these shantytowns or the communities of free blacks that existed on the periphery of nineteenth-century New York City, like Weeksville in what is now the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, as suburbs.

Taming Manhattan covers tremendous amount of ground, and there are times when the argument bogs amid all the detail that remains from its origins as a dissertation. A general reader could well lose sight of its argument and fail to divine its structure; further pruning of superfluous details and better signposting of the argument would have been in order. One other flaw is that McNeur does not make sufficient allowance for the extraordinary population growth that New York City experienced in the first half of the nineteenth century. Obviously, McNeur knows that New York City was booming in this period, and her last two chapters in particular track responses to that growth. However, she does not fully consider the scope of that growth or its implications for her account. In fact, its economic and population growth was astounding. In 1800, New York City (then confined to Manhattan) was the second largest city in the United States; in 1900, New York (now the greater city of the five boroughs) had become the second largest city in the world, after London. From 1800 to 1860 alone, the population of New York City increased almost

² Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Becky M. Nickolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2004).

fourteen-fold, and that statistic, if anything, underestimates the extent of the increase, since urban development also spilled over onto neighboring places like the then-independent city of Brooklyn and the port-and-manufacturing centers like Jersey City that had become part of the metropolitan region. Someone who was born in Manhattan in 1800 and who was living in the same house on the same street sixty years later would nevertheless have experienced a fundamental transformation of neighborhood, city, and region that Americans can scarcely imagine anymore; today, it is places like Shanghai and Beijing in China, Delhi in India, and Lagos in Nigeria that are exploding, rather than U.S. cities. As for antebellum New York City, it hard to conceive of any environmental arrangements that would not have cracked under the pressure of such tremendous demographic and physical changes, or any municipal government that would have proved equal to these challenges. Had McNeur more systematically compared New York City with other large U.S. cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New Orleans, she might have been able to put more stress on the singular role that explosive population growth played in the New York City case.

The urban spatial structure also changed markedly in this period. Following the advent of horse railways in the 1830s, New York (and other big U.S. cities) began to transition from the dense, compact, and jumbled pre-industrial “walking city” pattern to a more modern spatial structure that covered larger geographical areas and featured separate locations for retailing, manufacturing, and residence. Instead of living cheek by jowl as they had in the micro-landscape of colonial and early republic periods, the affluent increasingly resided on the periphery and the poor were relegated to the center, a spatial pattern that gradually expanded the social and physical distance between these groups. In *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (1995), Andrew Hurley found that the emergence of middle-class suburbs in twentieth-century Gary, Indiana coincided with the transfer of industrial pollutants from one medium (air) where it more or less affected everyone to another medium (land) where it overwhelmingly impinged on poor African-Americans. Antebellum New York City was still in the early stages of this spatial reordering, and upper-class New Yorkers still resided very close to working-class New Yorkers. (In my own work I’ve found that relatively few upper-class New Yorkers relocated across the East River to the Brooklyn Heights; rather, that pioneering suburb was settled largely by New England natives who had weak attachments to New York City.) McNeur writes of nuisance industries like offal establishments relocating outside of the built-up areas, and I would be interested to know to what extent those removals were part of the changing urban morphology and whether any of them resembled the patterns of environmental inequality that Hurley and others have found for later periods. I bring up this point as a question rather than as a criticism, in order to take advantage of the possibilities that this roundtable format creates for open-ended discussion.

Last year, my colleagues and I dropped the U.S. survey and began offering topical introductory courses in our areas of specialty, with mine being the history of New

York City. As soon as *Taming Manhattan* is available in paperback, I plan to start assigning it. This is outstanding book by an outstanding young scholar, and I am sure that it will help my students better appreciate the range of historical approaches that exist to writing the history of cities.

Comments by Melanie Kiechle, Virginia Tech

“Imagining Pigs in Manhattan”

During a family visit last spring, my aunt chose *Taming Manhattan* from the many fascinating titles stacked on my desk. Despite my commensurate hosting skills, she barely put the book down for the rest of her visit and kept saying, “Pigs! In Manhattan! Can you imagine?”

Can you imagine pigs in Manhattan? This exercise in historical imagination is the central charm and attraction of McNeur’s book. *Taming Manhattan* takes us into a city that we all presume to know, and shows us just how different and how foreign its past is...and yet, how similar to today’s hipsters and homesteaders raising urban chickens and eating local.

But the similarities between today’s hipsters and the poor of antebellum New York is far from the point of this complex history of how land use regulation was created and enforced in New York City. McNeur wants all of her readers to understand just how false and superficial such a comparison is and, I suspect, asks that we please stop making it. While today’s urban homesteaders hope to reclaim city spaces for (admittedly limited) agricultural pursuits and live the supposedly healthier, local-oriented life of yore, residents of the antebellum city eked out a living from a de facto urban commons that provided meager sustenance and subsistence for those on the economic and social margins. Were yesteryear’s local omnivores healthier than today’s urban residents who struggle with the obesity epidemic? That depends on how you define health—as McNeur points out, “eating local” in antebellum New York meant imbibing swill milk and ingesting pork that had fattened on the city’s garbage.

And health, however defined, was at best a secondary aim of restricting uses of the urban environment. As McNeur guides her readers through the details of expanding urban governance and increasing regulation in the ever-growing antebellum city, she argues that “efforts to tame the city were attacks on an informal economy that supported a large segment of the city’s poor” (3). Her first chapter explains how city leaders tried to rein in, quite literally, the mad dogs and loose hogs that roamed city streets. Though halting and haphazard, this effort included registering dogs, rounding up hogs and levying ownership taxes or fines that owners had to pay to reclaim their animals. In essence, these fines were regressive taxes, as the city’s poorer residents were the primary owners of hogs and the least able to afford the \$3 dog registration. The war of public opinion might not have pinched as hard as the fines, but it makes the class dimensions of controlling animals quite clear. While the hog-owning poor defended free range practices as beneficial to urban sanitation (hungry hogs removed filth from city streets), hog-opposing elites conflated the behavior of hogs with that of their owners, mocking both animals and owners as outsiders to city order.

As McNeur's first chapter makes clear, both finances and rhetoric shaped urban development. This holds true in subsequent chapters about the government support for private parks and the private financing of city trees; the painfully slow development of urban sanitation through profitable manure contracts and deadly cholera epidemics; and the corruption that accompanied the growing restrictions on fat renderers and distilleries as urban nuisances. There are many ironies and unintended consequences in these stories, which unfurled over decades rather than in campaign debates. Backtracking, contradictory policies and lax enforcement are as telling of ambivalence to changing the nature of the city as the violent riots wherein the city's poor rejected environmental regulations and government control.

It is unclear if New Yorkers en masse ever lost that ambivalence, which might also be characterized as uncertainty about best practices, but certain individuals exerted their strong ideas and wills over the city. Politicians and political appointees found ways to increase their personal profits as New York City's government improved its ability to control the environment. The corruption of low-level officials who expelled fat renderers while simultaneously becoming silent partners in new rendering operations just beyond city boundaries that always got the city contract is neither glamorous nor likely to inspire further historical exposés. Nevertheless, these local officials were responsible for changing urban land uses and condemning the poor to deeper poverty, both enduring effects of their desire for graft. As McNeur eloquently summarizes, "The government's role was more complicated than simply acting in the public's best interest" (149). It was also more complicated than simply expelling the poor and their agricultural practices.

Which brings me to the question that this book raised for me, but neither answered nor ever asked directly: why can't we imagine pigs in Manhattan, or cows in Brooklyn, or agriculture of any sort in today's cities? My aunt, who was so bemused to read about Manhattan's porcine residents of yore, lives on a working farm, as do most of my family members. Dairy farmers all, they tell me that farmers are true stewards of the land, and have a keen, deeply embedded understanding of agriculture's importance to sustaining city life. [Forget the cute bumper stickers; my father quotes William Jennings Bryan on grass growing in city streets.] And yet my aunt was amused to no end by the idea that agriculture, with all its attendant messiness of willful animals and endless manure and fertilized fields, might occur within cities. The land use regulations put in place during the nineteenth century successfully redefined farming as an exclusively rural practice. But where did that idea that farming could only be rural come from? What made city life and farming incompatible?

This question was especially pressing for me during the final chapter, when McNeur revisits the now familiar story of shantytowns destroyed, communities razed and residents dispossessed to make way for Central Park. Focusing on Charles Loring Brace and Frederick Law Olmsted's visions for the park, McNeur briefly tells readers about Brace and Olmsted's travels through England. There, the two reformers

discovered the beauty of bucolic landscapes and noted the desperate conditions of farm workers, whom Olmsted summarized as living lowly like domestic animals—a familiar rhetoric that recalls urban elites’ conflation of hog-owners with hogs. Both Olmsted and Brace knew that the rolling hills and emerald fields they admired were the product of agriculture that included poor farm workers barely able to live off the land. Nevertheless, they concluded that the countryside would help uplift New York City’s poor.

McNeur is a generous reader of Brace and Olmsted’s work and intentions, seeing the ways that both tried to help the urban poor by changing the urban environment. Brace’s efforts to “help children rise above their family’s station and problems” included sending children from the city to the countryside, trips on which “the children essentially learned where rural land uses belonged” (196). These quotes are all McNeur’s words, but since her previous chapters had so thoroughly illustrated the presence and even importance of so-called rural land uses in New York City, I have to wonder what made keeping pigs a rural activity in this moment. While the regulations detailed in previous chapters had tried to restrict certain practices from the core of the city, and subsequently pushed the poor and their animals to the geographic margins of the lived city, none of them had defined milking cows or keeping hogs as rural practices. If anything, the politicians who enforced rendering bans while becoming partners in rendering companies located just a little further afield made me think that city leaders did not see hogs or rendering as fundamentally incompatible with urban life. Thus McNeur’s sudden characterization of these activities as rural land uses leaves me wondering: does she also have trouble imagining pigs in Manhattan?

Furthermore, the practices that McNeur details—keeping hogs, rendering fat, milking cows, manure contracts, planting trees, debating the use of open spaces—did not become exclusively rural when Brace wrote. Instead, these practices and attempts to regulate them continued in American cities, including New York, long after the Civil War. As I read about Olmsted’s design for Central Park as a bucolic space that parroted the countryside but rejected farms, I was struck by the control inherent in his vision of *rus in urbo*. As Park Superintendent, Olmsted not only oversaw the landscape, but also the interactions that park visitors could have with his landscape. He created rolling hills that approximated England’s countryside, but eliminated the people and actions that constructed the landscape he so admired.

In essence, Central Park offered New York City’s residents and visitors the countryside without its defining industry. We know that Olmsted saw his creation as rural beauty, but how did poor immigrants think about the space? When they visited, did they see the romantic countryside that they had left behind in moving to New York City, or did they see oppression—not just the oppression of being restricted from or highly policed within the park, but also the oppression of rural poverty and tenant farming that this landscape likely recalled for them? In seeing the countryside as a place of moral uplift, both Olmsted and Brace ignored the realities of rural poverty that had encountered in their travels...and have subsequently

bequeathed that imagined rurality without agriculture to us with Central Park, even as we try to imagine pigs in Manhattan.

Comments by Matthew Gandy, University of Cambridge

T*aming Manhattan* is an exceptionally interesting book. Catherine McNeur has amassed a wealth of primary materials to shed new light on what we think we already know about that intensively studied urban locale that is New York. She weaves a fine-grained account of environmental conflict during the early decades of the nineteenth century into a compelling larger narrative about the origins of urban environmental politics and attempts to bring a modicum of order to the chaotic environs of the nineteenth-century industrial metropolis.

Central to McNeur's analysis is the threatening presence of a contested realm that she refers to as the "urban commons" comprising a medley of streets, yards, and ostensibly empty spaces, finding its most extensive expression towards the fringes of the rapidly growing city. In vivid and often disturbingly funny terms she describes everyday life in antebellum Manhattan and the seemingly intractable environmental hazards faced by all but the wealthiest citizens (though even the most well dressed representatives of high society ran the risk of being upended by aggressive pigs, bitten by rabid dogs, or succumbing to the episodic threat of cholera and other diseases). Her description of sadistic attacks on dogs—including pets unlucky enough to be set upon in the street—is reminiscent of Robert Darnton's classic essay on the massacre of cats in pre-revolutionary France. In this sense, the status and vulnerability of non-human nature serves as a symbolic precursor to later violence exemplified by the draft riots of 1863.³

In McNeur's hands the "urban commons" is not a neo-Lefebvrian space of freedom and imagination but a zone of violence and desperation. It is no accident that Frederick Law Olmsted's entry into the field of urban design for Manhattan brought into focus the emerging tensions between the idea of nature as a source of human sustenance and the articulation of a metropolitan nature as a means of didacticism, social elevation, and land speculation (without which the political case for new forms of landscape engineering could never have been won). The taming of Manhattan's nature was, as McNeur shows, a simultaneous process of "othering" whereby environmental hazards became synonymous with the marginalized people who depended on unwanted practices such as bone boiling, offal collection or urban piggeries for their economic survival. We discover how the precarious conditions of the urban labour market underpinned the rapidly deteriorating environmental conditions experienced in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

The book effectively conveys the pervasive stench of the antebellum city in the context of a prevailing emphasis on miasmatic understandings of disease transmission. The olfactory topography of the city was therefore not just a matter of discomfort or disgust but perceived as a very real threat in the pre-bacteriological era. An important theme to reflect on is how public cultures of disgust were emerging

³ Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

during the first half of the nineteenth century: it would be interesting to connect McNeur's analysis with cultural histories of the human body including changing perceptions of dirt and hygiene.

Occasionally McNeur touches on a theme but leaves it tantalizingly underdeveloped. In her brief discussion of street trees, for example, she suggests that the planting of trees "feminized" the city by creating "elite female space" (p. 89). It is clear that she does not mean to imply an essentialist relationship between gender and vegetation but it would be fascinating to know more about the intersection between nature, gender, and the shifting boundary between private and public space. Another intriguing line of argument is her claim that the politics of hog control in the Eighth Ward formed part of a wider process of "gentrification" in the face of the "swinish nuisance" (p. 39). Given the etymological origins of the term gentrification in the landed gentry of rural Britain it would be interesting to see how McNeur could weave this cultural and material transition into a wider reflection on different forms of rurality that emerges later in the book where she writes: "The rural antidote for urban ills came at the expense of what was truly rural about the city. What survived was an elite ideal of rural life, something more akin to country estates than working farms" (p. 219). Could this argument be taken further to articulate how the concept of nature itself was undergoing a shift towards a different set of social relations that incorporated idealized landscapes beyond the metropolitan fringe into a new kind of cultural synthesis?

McNeur presents a very robust argument about the specific dynamics of environmental politics between the 1820s and the 1840s in Manhattan but as a consequence this leaves the comparative implications of the study largely unexplored. It would be interesting to know, for example, why New York was much dirtier than other cities such as Boston and Philadelphia: was this simply a matter of material contingencies or underlying social and political differences? Or was it most likely a dynamic combination of both? McNeur's observations about the urban fringe are similarly fascinating. She quite rightly notes how the shantytowns swept aside by the construction of Central Park were "the forgotten and neglected early suburbs of New York" (p. 184). Could the author be tempted to reflect on the types of environmental conflict now being experienced at the edges of expanding cities in the global South? At times it seems as if McNeur has sought to steer a path between "restrictive" and "expansive" variants of urban and environmental history: the former confined to the analysis of a precisely defined empirical phenomenon whilst the latter makes imaginative conceptual leaps into wider conceptual, disciplinary, and material terrains. Although much urban and environmental history remains confined to a "restrictive" mode of writing and analysis the sheer exuberance of McNeur's book points very much in the direction of "expansive" approaches exemplified by environmental historians such as David Blackbourn and William Cronon.⁴

⁴ Examples of "expansive" approaches to environmental history include David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (London:

McNeur's *Taming Manhattan* is without doubt an extremely important addition to the literature on not just nineteenth-century New York but the wider field of urban and environmental history. Additionally, the book raises fascinating questions about changing human-animal relations under modernity and the centrality of race, ethnicity, and class to any nuanced understanding of the history of urban environmental politics. In the epilogue to her stunning book McNeur shows how the extreme violence of New York's draft riots in the summer of 1863 originated from a simmering sense of grievance over the city's "urban commons" and perceived inequalities in the chance to scrape together a living under intense social, economic, and environmental pressures.

Comments by Carl Zimring, Pratt Institute

“Boats Against the Current”

Our discussion of Catherine McNeur’s splendid book offers opportunities to see how urban environmental history has evolved and where it may be headed. A quarter century ago, William Cronon advanced the field of urban environmental history with the magisterial *Nature’s Metropolis*, a dense investigation of how industrial activity in nineteenth-century Chicago transformed not only local waterways like the Chicago River, but also the vast expanses of rural land throughout the Midwest. Cronon’s investigations of lumber, grain, and meat markets continue to shape the stories historians tell of urban environments.⁵ Criticisms of *Nature’s Metropolis* also shape those stories. Robin Einhorn famously identified the glaring blind spot of Cronon’s book as an absence of people in the narrative. By contrast, the narrative Catherine McNeur tells of nineteenth-century Manhattan focuses on the people of the island and the tensions between them over dirt, animals, and open space. If Cronon observed the scale of Bubbly Creek’s filth and fetid water as a result of industrial slaughterhouses, McNeur gives ample attention to the cramped urban conditions and poor access to drinking water as a breeding ground for cholera epidemics that affected New Yorkers (and that New Yorkers fought as they struggled to survive). If environmental history is the lived experience of humans interacting with the air, land, and water, McNeur deepens that analysis where Cronon did not. Her work on this dimension of the city’s history builds upon the work Joel Tarr, Martin Melosi, and Christine Rosen have done on sanitation and nuisance.⁶

Conflicts between people especially over the use of hogs, dogs, goats, and horses provide strength to the narrative and demonstrate how nuanced historians’ treatments of these relationships have been since Cronon’s utilitarian discussion of turning animals into meat. As an example of the human-animal relationship in urban history, *Taming Manhattan* builds on the recent work of Tarr, Clay McShane, and Ann Norton Greene in articulating the complexities of how urban residents lived with, depended upon, and came into conflict with animals.⁷ Readers of the book will also get a sense of class tensions amongst antebellum New Yorkers that resonate with current debates over equitable access to public space. *Taming Manhattan* sits

⁵ William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

⁶ Joel A. Tarr, *The Search for the Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective* (Akron, Ohio: University of Akron Press, 1996); Martin V. Melosi, *The Sanitary City: Environmental Services in Urban America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Christine Meisner Rosen, “‘Knowing’ Industrial Pollution: Nuisance Law and the Power of Tradition in a Time of Rapid Economic Change, 1840-1864,” *Environmental History* 8, No. 4 (October 2003), 565-597.

⁷ Clay McShane and Joel A. Tarr, *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Ann Norton Greene, *Horses at Work: Harnessing Power in Industrial America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

with Michael Rawson's recent *Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston* and several of the edited volumes in the University of Pittsburgh Press's History of the Urban Environment series in illuminating the complex relationships Americans have had with each other, other species, and the urban environment far beyond what Cronon described.⁸ Her conclusion that the upper classes sought "a tightly controlled environment," in which controlling sanitation and how people used public space were Bloombergian "efforts aimed at making the city more livable, pleasant, and sustainable."⁹ In the wake of the Civil War's draft riots, McNeur concludes that these efforts privileged a bourgeois vision of the city in a way that magnified existing class tensions, concluding "perhaps the city was never truly tamed at all."¹⁰

One of the great achievements of *Taming Manhattan* is how it relates the tensions and anxieties of contemporary urban life to the tensions and anxieties urban dwellers experienced almost two hundred years ago. If history is a powerful tool in understanding the present and recommending effective practices for the future, this book represents an important contribution to how historians can analyze and critique sustainability policies.

I expect my fellow participants in this roundtable will discuss at length the ways McNeur brings working-class understandings of place and nature in the city to life, the complex discussion of how humans and animals interacted in the growing city, and her superb discussion of the centrality of sanitation and fear of disease in this contested environment. In the interests of fostering dialogue, I will limit my discussion of those strengths and focus on how *Taming Manhattan* reflects opportunities gained and lost in the evolving historiography of urban environmental history.

Which requires another look at Cronon. If *Taming Manhattan* succeeds where *Nature's Metropolis* failed in bringing people into an urban environmental history, it does so despite not achieving what Cronon accomplished in establishing the spatial relationship of Chicago to the landscapes and waterways that informed the processes and tensions of its industrial history. *Taming Manhattan* gives short shrift to Manhattan's logic of place, and how that logic produces the relationships between the people, the land, and the water.

The water looms large. It affects every relationship in *Taming Manhattan*. While access to drinking water is an important theme of the book, the relationship of New Yorkers and proximate bodies of water is more complex than simply access to drinking water. Here, the logic of place relates to concerns of New York City in the

⁸ These include Char Miller, *On the Border: An Environmental History of San Antonio* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004); Joel A. Tarr, ed. *Devastation and Renewal: An Environmental History of Pittsburgh and Its Region* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004); Anthony N. Penna and Conrad Edick, *Remaking Boston: An Environmental History of Boston and Its Surroundings* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

⁹ Catherine McNeur, *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 235.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

twenty-first century, and of the people who reside here. The centrality of water to urban life is not a new development in the historiography; Cronon focused on Chicago's site on the coast of Lake Michigan as well as the ways the city industrialized the Chicago River and adjoining waterways. Historical studies of cities in the Americas and Europe examine various relationships of cities to ports, bays, lakes, oceans, and rivers.¹¹

I say "here" because I am now one of the more than eight million people living in New York City. While I am in Brooklyn, it shares with Manhattan the status of being located on an island surrounded by water. The relationship of people, land, and water is constantly on my mind, and that informed my reading of *Taming Manhattan*.

My reading of the situation is informed by another city's history. As the historians Ari Kelman and Craig E. Colten have demonstrated, the vulnerable siting of New Orleans was evident before Hurricane Katrina, but that siting was logical because of the location's economic utility, or situation. The logic of site dictated New Orleans continue as a city despite mounting environmental challenges.¹²

Like New Orleans, the logic of New York City's place is defined by water that makes its site perilous and its situation lucrative. Manhattan is an island, proximate to the North American mainland and an entry to the Atlantic Ocean and access to Western Europe. Its situation made it the center of Dutch activity in the New World and central to later English activities. The city remains the largest of any in the United States and in 2015 has the most economic activity by some measures of any city on earth. The city's situation remains an advantage, but its site is endangered, as urban historians know from our recent experience.¹³

The Urban History Association's New York meeting in 2012 was most memorable for its conclusion. Hurricane Sandy (a storm of the century following two years after Hurricane Irene, a smaller storm of the century) delayed the departure of dozens of participants. That inconvenience was a small part of the devastation; more than fifty

¹¹ An incomplete list of notable works in this area includes Sarah S. Elkind, *Bay Cities and Water Politics: The Battle for Resources in Boston and Oakland* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998); Mark Cioc, *The Rhine: An Eco-Biography, 1815-2000* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller, eds., *Rivers in History: Perspectives on Waterways in Europe and North America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008); Sara B. Pritchard, *Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the Rhône* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Martin V. Melosi, *Precious Commodity: Providing Water for America's Cities* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

¹² Ari Kelman, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Craig E. Colten, *An Unnatural Metropolis: Wresting New Orleans from Nature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

¹³ For a few examples of indexes measuring urban economic activity, see Richard Florida, "Sorry, London: New York Is the World's Most Economically Powerful City," *CityLab* 3 March 2015. <http://www.citylab.com/work/2015/03/sorry-london-new-york-is-the-worlds-most-economically-powerful-city/386315/>.

city residents died (in addition to many more in the region outside the city's limits), and thousands of homes were destroyed.

Flooding affected Manhattan, Staten Island, Brooklyn, and Queens. In the weeks after the storm, formal city and federal recovery efforts were joined by grassroots OccupySandy activists to aid the most vulnerable New Yorkers. The southern portion of Manhattan island saw widespread flooding that damages homes, businesses, and infrastructure. The effects of the catastrophe on the city's transportation system and social fabric endure.

Some of the most vulnerable people in NYC live on or near the coast. But some of the wealthiest New Yorkers do as well. Battery Park, the Financial District, and Brooklyn Heights all fetch multimillion-dollar prices for small apartments in part because they overlook the water. The area around Brooklyn's Gowanus Canal (now designated as a Superfund site) is currently undergoing development that makes the word "gentrification" seem an understatement.

All this is happening as seas rise, storms become more volatile, and coastal regions across the world face threats of flooding. Island nations appeal to the United Nations for aid. The Netherlands experiments with releasing lands back into floodplains. New York City's relationship with its coastline boasts a belief that capital can tame the seas, an approach to urban design that Ted Steinberg has called "environmental machismo."¹⁴

Steinberg comes to his conclusion in his recent ecological history of New York, a history that extensively documents the long, contentious history of the city and the waters that surround it. Flooding and storms plagued Manhattan throughout its history, including during the period documented in McNeur's book. Steinberg notes a Category 1 hurricane hit the city in September of 1821, affecting ship traffic along the Hudson River and around Long Island (including the sinking of one ship). The storm was followed by forty years when the city embarked on development "in harm's way" on the island's coasts. This strategy represented a nineteenth-century version of the environmental machismo Steinberg sees in twenty-first century New York.¹⁵

Although New York City faced peril from the waters on its shores, it also found opportunity at that site, and the economic development that produced the inequities McNeur describes were rooted in its place. New York City built upon its status as the financial center of the United States during and after the period of this book. Infrastructure mattered. The Erie Canal, described by McNeur as an "artificial river" that had effects both on the state's environment as well as New York City,

¹⁴ Ted Steinberg, *Gotham Unbound: The Ecological History of Greater New York* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 351.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

where capital from its activity “led to significant social and economic changes, evident in its new parks and tree-lined streets.”¹⁶

This is important analysis in the history of the people and place of New York City. McNeur contextualizes the economic growth fueled by the Erie Canal as a catalyst for the class struggles on the island informing battles over animals and rights to land use. On that level, McNeur’s use of the Erie Canal is good. It is, however, wanting in telling the history of the people’s relationship with water. The Erie Canal directly and indirectly provided jobs to thousands of New Yorkers via shipping, including some of the most dangerous occupations of the nineteenth century. How did their work on and with the water make working-class Manhattanites vulnerable, and how did these vulnerabilities translate into struggles over the land and water?

McNeur spends considerable time on New York City’s water, largely as a medium that determined health or disease. Access to clean drinking water was threatened by dense human settlement, and many of the arguments over keeping animals related to sanitation and water. One can expand on the human-animal relationship to discuss how proximate waterways served as sinks to remove human and animal wastes, an analysis consistent with McNeur’s nuanced discussion of struggles over animals in the city. The extent to which urban workers risked their health and their lives to move horse carcasses from the streets to dump in the water would provide depth to our understanding of sanitary work in antebellum Manhattan.

Less explored are the dynamics of water as a medium for trade. In telling the history of Chicago a few decades after this story, Cronon notes that the railroads that spurred the rise of that city had several advantages over commercial river and canal traffic. Railroads were less vulnerable to the weather, allowing both more reliable shipping schedules and reducing wrecks. Wrecked ships were unattractive to capital; they also revealed the risks workers experienced on boats and in harbors.

New York City’s history has several documented incidents of those risks. In the waterways surrounding Manhattan, wrecks were common due to traffic and natural hazard. By midcentury, as Steinberg notes, the New York Harbor Commission requested federal aid to remove a particularly hazardous impediment in the East River known as Hell Gate. As with the Erie Canal, channels were deepened and dredged to improve traffic in and around New York Harbor and reduce (if not eliminate) the risks of working on the urban waterways.

The reason Steinberg’s analysis merits inclusion in a discussion of *Taming Manhattan* is critical discussion of the relationship between the island and the waters and waterways surrounding it is largely absent in this book. If the Erie Canal fostered tensions over land use, it was one of several developments (including the opening of the nation’s first dry dock on the East River in 1824) of the era that fueled heightened use of local waterways. By the late nineteenth century, traffic on

¹⁶ McNeur, 46.

the Hudson River, in New York Harbor, on the Gowanus Canal, and in the East River had effects on water pollution and heightened chances of accidents.

Further attention to water's role in the logic of Manhattan's place would both strengthen our understanding of how antebellum residents struggled over environmental amenities. It would also provide a relevant link to current attempts to reconcile New York City's relationship with its water and bolster McNeur's conclusion on how elite efforts to tame the urban environment were –and are– limited at best in their achievements. Whether the rising seas can be tamed is one of the defining questions of New York City in the twenty-first century; exploring its roots in the nineteenth century has value.

My carping in this roundtable risks obscuring the achievements of this book, and both Steinberg and I may be accused of unduly viewing the history of New York City through the events of the immediate past. But it is worth asking the questions: Does looking at the city's history through its troubled relationship with the surrounding waters a lens that speaks to her ambition to discuss the environmental inequalities and struggles of her chosen time and place? To what extent does site (as Colten, Cronon, and Kelman discuss in their books) factor into the social history of antebellum Manhattan? Are there ways in which Manhattanites' relationship with the water surrounding them inform the social and class struggles so ambitiously illuminated in this book?

That ambition is laudable and, for the most part, successfully realized in *Taming Manhattan*. Catherine McNeur has written a perceptive urban environmental history that avoids the sins of *Nature's Metropolis* in articulating the human tensions on how to manage and live in a dynamic, risky environment. In doing so, she provides valuable historical context on how to discuss the social dimensions of sustainability. What critiques I express are intended to advance that important project.

Response by Catherine McNeur, Portland State University

I have a distinct childhood memory of gazing out from the backseat of my parents' station wagon as we drove through Manhattan at night, entranced by the chaos of the bustling sidewalks, the tightly choreographed weaving and honking of cabs and cars, and the countless unknowable stories briefly visible in illuminated apartment windows. Understanding this vast, busy city seemed difficult, even impossible. When I began writing *Taming Manhattan* many years later, one of my goals was really just to get a handle on some of these stories and figure out why New York is the way it is, at least in some small way. It's really quite an honor to have these wonderful scholars whose work I've long admired take the time to read the stories I chose to highlight and open up a conversation on the nature of New York's urban environment.

I began this project after coming across a few lines about hog riots in William Burrows and Mike Wallace's *Gotham*.¹⁷ Like Melanie Kiechle's aunt, I was amused that there had been pigs sauntering down the streets of New York, let alone that people might riot over them. As I dug further into that history, I started unearthing all sorts of moments where people were battling over the future of New York's environment and that quickly snowballed into what became this book. I have to admit, I really enjoyed reading New Yorkers' complaints about their lives and their city.

While *Taming Manhattan* is ultimately about environmental injustices, one of the goals I had was to give all New Yorkers a fair representation. Whether I was successful, I'm not sure. In any case, I wanted to at least try to represent the perspective of the rich as well as the poor (and everyone in between), when I focused on the value of hogs and trash, as well as the benefits of clean streets and carefully landscaped parks. The history is not clearly black and white—there are several layers of gray. While the city became much healthier and more livable, many people simultaneously lost out in the process.

Urban agriculture and those who embraced it were on the losing side, for instance. Kiechle wonders if I wish people would stop comparing our modern embrace of urban homesteading with the historic brand of it: not at all, actually. I think it's a particularly rich comparison because backyard chickens and beekeeping are so widely accepted today. First, it highlights just how crucial the early nineteenth century was for defining what properly belonged in a city. The legislation that was written then is what modern urban farmers have been fighting to have their cities reverse. Second, I think it's particularly revealing that newspapers, city governments, and increasing numbers of neighborhoods accept and celebrate chickens and goats. The upper-middle class has embraced homesteading in ways would have disgusted their nineteenth-century counterparts. The fact that cities

¹⁷ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

proudly tout their support of urban agriculture has everything to do with who exactly practices it and that speaks volumes about the issues I'm discussing more than 150 years earlier in *Taming Manhattan*.

Kiechle notes a turning point in the final chapter "Clearing the Lungs of the City," when Charles Loring Brace and Frederick Law Olmsted, through their work with the Children's Aid Society and Central Park, helped to delineate land uses that properly belonged in a city. Brace took particular joy in sending children from an urban "piggery" to a distant farm, hoping they would return ashamed of their parents' business after having had a truly rural experience. Kiechle worries that, like Brace, I can't imagine pigs in New York. That can hardly be further from the truth. In fact, reimagining New York with pigs and showing readers how their disappearance was anything but inevitable is at the foundation of this project. She rightly points out that many of the expelled pigs still remained in the city. It's important to remember that the footprints of the built-up parts of Manhattan and Brooklyn in the 1850s were far from what they are today and most of these pigs were sent off to the less developed and arguably more rural regions at that time, even if they were technically within city bounds. In any case, I really think it's the cultural turn aided by sanitation legislation and heralded by Brace and Olmsted that pushes livestock such as pigs from cities and makes it hard for us to imagine their presence as appropriate today.

At the heart of most of the change occurring during this period is massive population growth, as Clifton Hood rightly emphasizes. Antebellum Manhattan was a "shock city," to use Harold L. Platt's term.¹⁸ The immense change occurring during this period drove a lot of the social and political anxiety simmering through each chapter. It led to the growing heaps of garbage littering the streets that caused many noses to cringe, fed pigs and dogs, soiled dresses, and provided materials for rag pickers. It drove certain New Yorkers to consider how they ought to better plan their city and whether they should include parks in those plans. It revealed how inadequate the infrastructure and social services were under the rule of a municipal government far too small and underfunded for the growing population it represented. Population growth was key.

And partly, it was the massive population growth that really made New York different from its sister cities, like Boston and Philadelphia, who embraced any opportunity to mock New York and its notorious pigs and sanitation troubles. Matthew Gandy is correct that it likely was some combination of material, social, and political circumstances that made New York stand out as the so-called "Dung Heap of the Universe." For instance, there are moments where you see Boston enforcing anti-pig legislation, while some New York councilmen are (at least briefly) arguing that getting rid of the pigs might be too severe a punishment for their impoverished constituents. New York also had an extremely high ratio of

¹⁸ Harold L. Platt, *Shock Cities: The Environmental Transformation and Reform of Manchester and Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

constituents to representatives, making efficient government enforcement and effective social programs a pipe dream for most of these decades. Those local quirks put New York's situation and notoriety in perspective. Still, I believe fast-paced expansion is at the heart of it. I think we might see similar situations in any city growing faster than its infrastructure, social services, and municipal government can handle.

It is really in that growth that antebellum New York can be fruitfully compared to cities in the global South, as Gandy points out, that are facing similar challenges today. It would be farfetched for me to suggest that *Taming Manhattan* might offer solutions for environmental problems in these modern cities, but I do think that revisiting the history of how we've dealt with similar issues can show us some of the unintended consequences and inequalities that emerge even when politicians and reformers have the best intentions. For instance, it's difficult to find anyone in the mid-nineteenth century speaking out on behalf of the residents expelled from what would become Central Park. Any program that comes off as an indisputable public good or, nowadays, as being "sustainable" likely entails losses that we might overlook.

Public spaces and sites of common resources are places where many of these inequalities become most visible. Gandy suggests that the urban commons in *Taming Manhattan* is a "zone of violence and desperation" rather than freedom and imagination. I agree, though I would contend that there is a certain amount of creativity and imagination involved in the constant foraging and repurposing of trash in those spaces. While New Yorkers were frequently fighting over what could happen there, the fact that people found ways to eke out a living by turning twigs into matches and selling animal bones to toothbrush manufacturers reeks of imagination to me. So perhaps it's all of the above.

Also speaking to imagination, Kiechle wonders if the poor saw the pastoral design of Central Park as repressive, perhaps hearkening back to their former or current lives (at least for some of them) working in rural settings. I'd hesitate to make that assumption. The study of working-class recreation in parks is getting some great and much-needed attention. While Betsy Blackmar and Roy Rosenzweig cleared a lot of paths for this field, I'm particularly enthusiastic about Colin Fisher's new book, *Urban Green*, which really complicates the labor/leisure boundaries that environmental historians typically draw.¹⁹

I particularly love Gandy's molding of "gentrification" to not only include the politics of hog control that I discuss in early chapters but also the new fetishizing of non-productive pastoral nature, such as in Central Park. I wish I had played with this more in the text. Michael Rawson shows similar patterns happening in various ways

¹⁹ Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Colin Fisher, *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

with nature in Boston at the same moment in *Eden on the Charles*.²⁰ While purists might balk at using a twentieth-century term like “gentrification” to mark this nineteenth-century phenomenon, it does in some ways describe the transitions occurring throughout the fast-changing city.

And in terms of these neighborhood changes, Hood brings up the kinds of spatial transformations occurring in cities such as New York as streetcars allowed wealthier New Yorkers to live out of walking distance from their offices. The full separation of wealthy and working-class neighborhoods is far from complete by the time my story closes at the end of the Civil War, but the fact that high-end development is edging closer to the shantytowns on the outskirts of the city brings them more into the spotlight and causes more distress among reformers and their ilk about how to handle both the residents of the shanties and their animals that seem to keep wandering over to the nicer homes in the area. The early fire insurance maps in the 1850s actually show the shanties and how close they lie to many of the newly-built row houses and finer homes going up. There’s a lot of material in these maps for a wonderful digital history project.

Zooming out from the neighborhood to the larger region, much of Carl Zimring’s critique deals with the scale I chose. As Zimring points out, critics targeted Bill Cronon’s *Nature’s Metropolis* for its bird’s-eye perspective but really that’s the book’s true asset, too.²¹ While I’d argue that I tackled New York’s environment on multiple scales from individual bodies to the larger surrounding region depending on the specific story, the primary focus of the book is on the sidewalk filth, loose rabid dogs, promenades, and bodies of New Yorkers consuming corrupted food. Like Cronon’s bird’s-eye view, there similarly are benefits to highlighting the significance of battles that occur on smaller scales and these histories can speak volumes to the larger trends occurring in the city more broadly.

Returning to my childhood car ride and my inability back then to wrap my mind around all that was occurring simultaneously in the city: there are truly countless stories that can be told about a city. There are certainly more stories than I was able to touch on that could reveal the environmental inequalities of New York’s past and present. While water flows through just about every chapter, Zimring is right that I didn’t focus exclusively on the ports or the infill happening on the edges of the island. I do talk about horse carcasses and garbage floating in the rivers, human excrement clogging the slips, and the unequal and unreliable access to water for drinking, sanitation, and fire prevention. The joy of participating in a roundtable such as this is to begin a conversation that might open up possible projects for others, such as a social history of NYC’s waterfront. Hopefully someone will take up where Ted Steinberg and I left off and investigate the many-layered social and

²⁰ Michael Rawson, *Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

²¹ William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: Norton, 1991).

environmental histories of the land most endangered today by rising sea levels and storms like Hurricane Sandy.²²

It is quite a treat to have a group of scholars such as this get their feet dirty in the muck of antebellum New York and engage in such a lively discussion. Urban environmental history has a lot of room for growth, creativity, and expansion, and I, for one, look forward to seeing what comes next.

²² Ted Steinberg, *Gotham Unbound: The Ecological History of Greater New York* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

About the Contributors

Matthew Gandy is Professor of Geography at the University of Cambridge. His books and edited collections include *Urban Constellations* (2011), *The Acoustic City* (2014) and *The Fabric of Space: Water, Modernity, and the Urban Imagination* (2014), along with articles in *Architectural Design*, *New Left Review*, *Society and Space* and many other journals. He is currently researching the interface between cultural and scientific aspects to urban bio-diversity. His book *Moth* is forthcoming from the Reaktion animal series in 2016.

Clifton Hood is George E. Paulsen '49 Professor of American History and Government at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. He is the author of *722 Miles: The Building of the Subways and How They Transformed New York City* (1993) and *In Pursuit of Privilege: The Upper Class and the Making of New York City, since 1753* (forthcoming from Columbia University Press).

Christopher F. Jones, Assistant Professor in the School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies, studies the histories of energy, environment, and technology. He is the author of *Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America* (Harvard, 2014) and is currently working on a project examining the relationships between economic theories of growth and the depletion of non-renewable natural resources.

Melanie Kiechle, Assistant Professor of History at Virginia Tech, researches and writes at the intersection of urban-environmental history, history of medicine, and history of science. Her current book project, *Smell Detectives: An Olfactory History of Urban America*, explores how Americans used their sense of smell to understand and react to industrial growth and urban concentration between the rise of the public health movement and the Progressive Era.

Catherine McNeur is Assistant Professor of environmental history and public history at Portland State University in Oregon, where it's not uncommon to come across escaped backyard chickens or celebrated urban goats (as well as new condos named after displaced goats). For more on *Taming Manhattan* and her other work, see www.catherinemcneur.com.

Carl Zimring is Associate Professor of sustainability studies at Pratt Institute. He is the author of *Cash for Your Trash: Scrap Recycling in America* and *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States*.

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