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Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014). ISBN: 9781469614489

Carl A. Zimring, *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2016). ISBN: 9781479826940

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Introduction by Christopher F. Jones, Arizona State University

In 2003, Carolyn Merchant argued in her Presidential Address to the American Society for Environmental History that the field could and should do more to address the topic of race in environmental history.¹ While some scholars have ably risen to the occasion, fourteen years later the collective response has been underwhelming. Whether measured by number of books and articles, conference sessions organized, or impact on historiography, the intersections of race and environment remain underexplored.

Two exciting and recently published works take important steps toward rectifying this gap: *Black Faces, White Spaces* by Carolyn Finney and *Clean and White* by Carl Zimring. Each book could easily be the subject of its own roundtable, but I hoped that reviewing them together would generate a broader discussion of race and environmental history than might emerge from separate conversations. Thanks to the excellent efforts of the reviewers and authors, this goal has been fulfilled. In addition to providing insight into each of these books, the roundtable also offers a more extended look at the state of the field. Our collective hope is that this (freely available and open access!) roundtable can be a useful resource for both researchers and teachers.

While both books deal with race and the environment, they approach these issues with different aims and methodologies. Drawing on her background in geography, critical race studies, feminist studies, and environmental studies, Carolyn Finney's *Black Faces, White Spaces* integrates a wide range of sources and argument styles to investigate the experiences of African Americans in wilderness spaces that have been dominated by white bodies. She explores not only the barriers to access to natural spaces for African Americans, but also argues they have frequently been overcome. Black faces, despite the obstacles, have regularly appeared in nature, and her study explores why this reality has been ignored in the popular imagination as well as the historical record.

Trained in history and interested in critical discard studies, Carl Zimring's narrative in *Clean and White* shifts from the Great Outdoors to urban sanitation. Beginning with Thomas Jefferson and moving to the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers' strike, he demonstrates the long history of racially-biased environmental injustice in American history. His book demonstrates that notions of cleanliness and waste were directly connected to the construction of whiteness in American history, with the associated social privileges associated with whiteness accruing to certain groups while excluded populations bore the corresponding social harms. To be clean and live away from trash was to become white, and to handle or live near waste was to become non-white. The very construction of racial categories, he shows, were shaped by the handling of environmental refuse.

¹ Carolyn Merchant, "Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History" *Environmental History* vol. 8, no. 3 (2003).

Reviewing books in this format without the conventional genres of academic book reviews is always a challenge. In this case, I asked the reviewers to take on an enormously complex, and perhaps entirely unreasonable task: comment on two fascinating and very different books while reflecting on larger trends in the field and keeping to a relatively concise page count. Easy, right? To their considerable credit, they proved more than up to the task, as did the authors in their engaging responses.

I asked **Mary Mendoza** to comment on these books because of her interests in environmental history, race, and borderlands. Her work analyzing natural and built environments along the US-Mexico border recently won the W. Turrentine Jackson award from the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association for best dissertation on any aspect of the American West in the twentieth century.

Kathryn Morse has been a strong advocate for environmental historians to take race more seriously, and after reading her comments in a 2016 [Los Angeles Review of Books](#) article focusing on Finney's book, I approached her about this roundtable.² Her current research focuses on home gardening programs in the American South during the New Deal era, with a particular emphasis on race and class.

Richard M. Mizelle, Jr. brings a background combining environmental history with questions of race, technology, and health to the roundtable. He has written about African Americans and the environment through the lens of the 1927 flood of the Mississippi River and is currently examining the interconnections between race and diabetes during the last two centuries.

Traci Brynne Voyles completes our roundtable, contributing her expertise in ethnic studies, environmental history, and environmental justice to the conversation. Her research has analyzed the consequences of uranium mining on Navajo lands and she is currently exploring California's Salton Sea and its environmental and cultural history.

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.

² Catherine Buni, "Toward a Wider View of Nature Writing," *LA Review of Books*, 10 January 2016.

Comments by Mary E. Mendoza, University of Vermont

In his 1993 essay, “Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement,” Robert Bullard explored why and how people of color “are disproportionately harmed by industrial toxins on their jobs and in their neighborhoods.”³ He asked why marginalized groups must “contend with dirty air and drinking water—the byproducts of municipal landfills, incinerators, polluting industries, and hazardous waste treatment, storage, and disposal facilities,” attributing these conditions to a long history of “white racism” in the United States. He ended his essay by addressing the ways in which the mainstream environmental movement has historically been supported by “middle- and upper-middle-class whites” but argued that “concern for the environment cuts across class and racial lines.” In short, he asked why it is that some communities “get dumped on” and why the mainstream environmental movement has failed to incorporate the concerns and perspectives of people of color? For decades now, environmental justice scholars have grappled with such questions. Citing Bullard’s work ten years later, Carolyn Merchant called on Environmental Historians to incorporate issues of environmental justice into historical work, pushing us to consider the ways in which environmental history can explain the inequalities that scholars like Robert Bullard examined. In her presidential address to the American Society for Environmental History, Merchant highlighted the deeply fraught human relationship with nature that defined race relations, noting that in making our national parks “white and pure for the benefit of white tourists,” Anglo-Americans marginalized and excluded people of color from “white spaces.” She argued that environmental historians had begun to tackle questions of environmental racism, but that there was much work to be done in the field.⁴ Continuing that work, Carl Zimring in *Clean and White* and Carolyn Finney in *Black Faces, White Spaces* address the question that both Bullard and Merchant collectively raise: how can *history* explain the creation of “white spaces”—whether white neighborhoods, national parks, or the environmental movement itself—to the exclusion (and detriment) of people of color? Both books move us closer to understanding the complicated and intertwined historical relationships between race and environment.

Zimring’s book traces the wide-sweeping history of dirt’s entanglement with environmental racism in the United States from Thomas Jefferson to modern day conversations about race and environment. Focusing on waste and dirt, Zimring explains both how people of color came to be exposed disproportionately to toxins and how “contested minorities such as Southern and Eastern Europeans successfully adopted American notions of hygiene to achieve white identity” (3). Beginning with Thomas Jefferson’s disdain for the filth of cities as well as his

³ Robert D. Bullard, “Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement” in Robert D. Bullard, ed. *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices From the Grassroots* (Boston: South End Press, 1993), 15-39.

⁴ Carolyn Merchant, “Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History” *Environmental History* vol. 8, no. 3 (2003).

conflicted ideas about slavery, race, and equality, Zimring uses Jefferson to set up a discussion about longstanding notions of whiteness and preoccupations with cleanliness in the early republic. Early on, sanitation services “were primitive” and Jefferson’s ideas “preserved a social structure that privileged whites” but the connection between dirt and race was not initially explicit. As the nation industrialized, though, immigrants flocked to work in American cities, creating an underclass. Thousands of people and their animals crowded city streets with no place for material waste. Cholera plagued cities, disproportionately affecting the poor. As sanitarians flocked to cities to fight the spread of disease with cleanliness, the impoverished became associated with immorality, laziness, and filth.

The Civil War era saw a shift from associations with filth as a class-based issue to one more explicitly linked to race. Threats to the system of slavery hardened racial categories outside of cities and, to some degree, within them. The chaos and disease that the war spread provoked fear among whites about what a new social order would look like in the absence of a race-based system of slavery. Race, after all, was a central component of the war. As disease ravaged camps, sanitarians came up with theories for fighting illness by eradicating dirt. By the end of the Civil War era, race and dirt became intertwined.

As cities continued to grow in the age of industrialization, waste continued to cause problems and by the turn of the century, hygiene and cleanliness had become conflated with whiteness and “the racialization of hygiene produced tensions within racial categories” (80). In the following decades, representations of colored bodies in need of baths could be found in advertisements for soap and other cleaning products, reinforcing the racist discourse that people of color were covered in dirt and filth, and thus threatening.

The rhetoric and visual representations of people of color, though, combined with city growth and increased waste also created opportunity for some marginalized communities. Because it was dirty work, sanitation work like street cleaning or peddling scrap metal fell to those people perceived to be closest to that waste. In describing the growing demand for sanitary workers, Zimring writes, “If the rhetoric of “clean and white” marginalized non-white people into dirty work, it also unwittingly provided economic opportunity.” Jewish and Italian immigrants built lucrative businesses out of disposing of waste, and, although it was not easy, it paved the way to whiteness for them. With continued city growth, noxious fumes and filthy streets pushed the wealthy away from city to suburb. Those who could afford it fled increasingly polluted cities and “environmental burdens on African Americans and Hispanics grew heavier over the course of the twentieth century” (169). Jewish and Italian waste companies had grown over time, allowing the business owners to employ other people to do their dirty work. In the postwar era, when other racial tensions dominated the national conversation, white ethnics propelled themselves firmly into whiteness, revealing both the fluidity and rigidity of racial categories all at once. People of color remained marginalized, but

prospering Jews and Italians now oversaw labor performed by people of color. As ethnic whites distanced themselves from the waste itself, they became more white.

By following the dirt, Zimring is able to show how the changing human relationship with waste ultimately created and transformed social hierarchies, leaving African Americans and other people of color exposed to the filthiest, most toxic places in the nation and ultimately creating geographies in which “clean” spaces were filled with “white faces.” Race became inscribed into the geography of the nation’s cities. He ends the book by discussing resistance by people of color and critiquing the mainstream environmental movement for not fully incorporating their voices, noting that associations with dirt and people of color remain pervasive.

Although the book, overall, is a fantastic contribution to literature on white racial formation as it relates to the environment, I was left wondering how city growth in the west might have complicated the narrative of whiteness. Zimring does briefly mention the western city of San Francisco and notes that Asians and Hispanics alike also found themselves in the sanitation industry, but the detail on how this played out is scant. How did these ideas affect Asians, Hispanics, or Indigenous peoples who found themselves somewhere in between the black/white binary? In that same vein, as he discussed notions of pseudoscientific justifications for racism based on sanitation, I wondered about immigration in the west and how works of scholars like Natalia Molina or Alexandra Minna Stern who have written extensively about public health and racialization might have further informed this work. Finally, I would have liked to have seen a more extensive discussion about how the development of the germ theory actually affected this process. Zimring mentions it briefly, but also refers to “germs” and fear of them as early as the 1860s, well before the theory was established and well-known. These musings aside, Zimring’s work is an excellent discussion of how dirt has shaped race relations, and especially the construction of whiteness over time.

If Zimring is ultimately concerned with understanding how certain geographies, mostly in American cities, have been historically racialized, Carolyn Finney’s *Black Faces, White Spaces* asks how recreational outdoor spaces away from the city have also been racialized. Her interdisciplinary book vacillates between past and present to reveal the complexities of the African American experience to the “Great Outdoors” and asks why outdoor spaces like parks have been and continue to be associated with whiteness. In her six-chapter book, she explores how memory and historical experience inform environmental interaction for African Americans, how representations of the outdoors are racialized, how that racialization affects the African American psyche, and, finally, how history and representation work together to deter and/or obscure African American environmental activism in the mainstream environmental movement.

Throughout the book, Finney draws on history to demonstrate how deeply rooted institutional racism has discouraged African Americans from participating in outdoor culture. She rightly points out that, from the beginning, the “black

environmental experience on Americans soil” was “working the land under the threat of the whip and sun” (57). Even when slaves were able to escape and find refuge in the woods, they lived under constant fear that they would be found. After emancipation, Jim Crow perpetuated the tension between African Americans and the outdoors, as the threat and fear of lynching permeated African American households well into the twentieth century. Much like Zimring, Finney points out that as the nation grew, “the emerging narrative that defined ‘the Negro’s place in Nature’ managed to, in one fell swoop, place black people at the bottom of the evolutionary rung while reifying whiteness” as superior. This hierarchy dictated that the African American experience outdoors became associated with labor or danger more than leisure. Although African Americans performed the dirty work of building the nation, they became disassociated from “white and pure” outdoor leisure spaces like national parks which were “overlaid with histories seen and unseen; geographies of fear that can make a “natural” place in the United States suspect to an African American” (117).

As she explores the historically fraught relationship between African Americans and the outdoors, Finney also argues that the paucity of positive representations of African American in the outdoors has been a powerful tool of racialized exclusion. “Representations of African Americans,” she argues, “not only shape their imagination, but also inform the imagination of Americans as a whole” (74). Very often, images of African Americans in media “distort their humanity” which not only discourages them from engaging in particular activities, but also perpetuates narratives of African Americans as environmental others and obscures the environmental work that they *actually are doing*. These representational and historical forces combined, then, explain the real and perceived tension between African Americans and the mainstream (white) environmental movement.

Finney’s book is a much-needed contribution to the growing body of literature on race and environment. As she states, black history is not divorced from white history. It is messy and intertwined in ways that we ought to acknowledge. Perhaps the biggest issue that this book raised for me is, how can historians and other scholars tackle the paradox of the metaphor of the table? That is to say, if Finney suggests that the deeply historical construction of “wilderness” as white is a problematic dominant narrative that should be dismantled, how do we also advocate for and recognize the work of people of color like Audrey Peterman whose work aligns with the environmental movement as it exists? That is to say, if the issue is not simply that African Americans and other people of color deserve a “seat at the table” in the environmental movement, but that we should scrap the old table and build a new one that accounts for differences in what we value and experience in nature, how does this book get us closer to that end? I find the notion that white narratives should not dictate the meaning of nature or environment to be right on target, but wished to have seen more examples that might push us away from traditional ways of “being green.” Finney did a fantastic job showing how African Americans actually *do* engage in important “environmental work” and in explaining why some might not want to engage at all, but other than an example of urban

beekeeping, there was not any real push to redefine or decolonize the meaning of environment itself or what constitutes environmental work. That is, it seemed to me that some of her examples only reinforced white narratives of what environment or environmental work should be.

By looking at cities and parks—the urban and “natural”—these two scholars have made significant strides in historicizing the relationships of whites, ethnic whites, and African Americans to the environment, further exposing the “anatomy of environmental racism” that scholars like Merchant and Bullard set out to understand. My questions for both authors would be where do we go from here? How can we discuss race and environment outside with the white/black binary? How do we dismantle a deeply entrenched and dominant (white) understanding of “environment?” While I understand that these were not the central questions for either of these authors, I wonder how the range of human experience with nature in a complicated and fluid system of social hierarchies complicates the stories that these authors bring to the fore. Of course, no single book could ever answer such complicated questions, but these authors have certainly opened a world of possibility.

Comments by Kathryn Morse, Middlebury College

In these new books, Carolyn Finney and Carl Zimring share an unflinching focus on race, space, and environment in U.S. culture and history. *Black Faces, White Spaces* and *Clean and White* complement each other in provocative ways, telling similar stories of Americans' parceling out of the physical environment according to hierarchical categories of race: black and white spaces assigned to black and white faces. Given that common ground, however, they speak in quite different voices.

Finney's book is a manifesto, ground-truthed in field work, personal experience, and broad reading of literature, scholarship, and popular culture. Finney's ardent mission is to awaken readers to the ways in which history, popular culture, representational media, and environmental organizations deny black Americans a meaningful historical place in or connection to spaces constructed as white: beaches, mountains, forests, rivers, trails, parks, suburbs. Her further goal is to push beyond the frame of environmental (in)justice, which for 40 years has supposedly focused African American environmental concern on unequal exposure to toxic and polluted environments, usually in cities. She seeks to desegregate American understandings of "the outdoors" and environmentalism, to deconstruct the cultural equation of environmental concern which assigns blacks to urban pollution and whites to the pastoral and the wild. She wants African Americans to have a seat at the front of the green bus.

Where Finney exhorts her readers to recognize of dominant and exclusive narratives in environmental thought and practice, Carl Zimring's *Clean and White* turns inward and to the past to uncover the historical origins of the very segregation Finney excoriates. In researching the racialized equation of "clean" with "white," and "dirty" with "black," Zimring confronts the 19th-century roots of the American equation of clean, green places with whiteness—white faces. Through targeted archival reading and research on racial ideas, urban waste trades and sanitation, soap advertising, industrial zoning, residential redlining, and the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Workers strike, *Clean and White* weaves together distinct discursive episodes to trace the origin story of what became known after 1980 as environmental racism: the purposeful targeting of African American and other non-white communities and neighborhoods for waste-related and polluting facilities such as landfills, scrap yards, incinerators, and power plants. Zimring expands environmental racism to also include the legal containment of non-white residents in polluted urban neighborhoods shared with waste industries, as well as the relegation of non-white workers to dangerous waste-related "dirty" jobs, including garbage collection and cleaning. Zimring traces these expressions of racism to the 19th century merger of environmental ideals of cleanliness and sanitation, on the one hand, and post-1865 reconstructions of whiteness on the other. As stated on p. 3, "Increasing scientific definitions of waste as hazard and of racial categories in the immediate antebellum period established a foundation for later racist constructions

that posited that white people were somehow cleaner than non-white people.” In the decades that followed, Zimring contends, “This assumption defined white supremacist thinking. Its evolution shaped environmental inequalities that endure in the twenty-first century, including in the marketing of cleaning products, the organization of labor markets handling wastes, and the spatial organization of waste management and residential segregation in the U.S” (3).

The two authors’ methodologies and approaches further reflect these differences between exhortation and contemplation, between opening toward the future and digging into the past. As a cultural geography based on field research in the 21st century, *Black Faces, White Spaces* enumerates through interviews and surveys the ways in which the dominant culture has rendered African Americans’ relationships with what white Americans term “nature” or “the environment” virtually invisible. Finney draws from field work with African Americans around the country, particularly those whose communities neighbor Everglades National Park, Biscayne National Park, and Big Cypress National Preserve. These stories and reflections, with others from members and employees of environmental organizations across the country, testify to African Americans’ long-standing love for, and efforts to conserve, specific places of great ecological and social value and historical meaning, from Amelia Island to Virginia Key Beach. She contrasts these achievements with painfully common instances of mainstream environmental discourse in national media portray all things “green” as entirely white.

In contrast, Zimring comes to his topic as an historian of waste and the waste trades, interested first in researching the ways in which 19th-and 20th-century cities (mostly Chicago, but others as well) managed waste and waste industries. His research revealed that for Eastern European immigrants, assimilation into the American suburban middle class involved leaving urban waste trades and companies behind in the city. For Jews, Italians, and Slavs, becoming white meant “cleaner” professions, away from waste, and cleaner professions helped make them white. Following that insight, and drawing from a broad range of secondary sources and compelling primary texts such as soap advertisements, Zimring patiently and carefully builds his case for cause and effect: Americans constructed ideas of waste and race together. Threatened by epidemic disease and urban disorder and dirt, white Americans before and during the Civil War embraced a gospel of sanitation which, after 1865 merged in meaning, metaphor, and in the dirt on the ground with the quest to defend whiteness against the threat of freed African Americans as they migrated North. Less white came to mean less clean, with both posing an existential threat to white supremacy whether through epidemic disease or racial mixing and pollution. The modern sanitary system, as applied in racially divided cities, reinforced a modern ideology of scientific white supremacy, and vice versa. Meanwhile, the physical labor of cleaning and garbage collection fell to the least white workers available, to black and brown men and women, themselves tainted by the labor of cleaning up for others. This left cities divided—and eventually zoned—into separate areas of white purity and brown and black contagion, and spurred white flight to the green and white suburbs.

Thus despite their differing methods and voices, these two books present two sides of the same coin: how dominant white supremacist culture constructed cities and non-white peoples as “naturally” threats, occupying real and ideological spaces of pollution and degradation; how that culture in turn constructed pastoral and wild spaces, and the white people “naturally” inhabiting them, as clean, pure, and safe, unthreatened by waste, disease, pollution, or inferior races. Placed side-by-side, the books confront the sources of assumptions regarding African American environmentalism: that African American interest in environmental reform is defined by pollution issues (environmental justice), largely urban, with little interest in or historical connection to green, pastoral, suburban, or wild landscapes. If it is a black space—the assumption goes—it must be wasted: urban, polluted, degraded. If it is not thus wasted—so the dominant narrative continues—African Americans have no interest in its protection or conservation.

Together these scholars reveal that in this dominant narrative, the “American” passage to the pastoral (Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral* duly noted) required a passage into whiteness and purity, one available to 20th century Irish, Jewish, Eastern and Southern European immigrants like Zimring’s ancestors, but in (racial) theory unavailable to Finney’s parents as black southerners, or to any African Americans, still, to do this day.⁵ In both detailing and assailing that narrative and its assumptions, these authors do bring their family histories to bear. Finney grew up on a stunning pastoral estate in Westchester, her parents stewarding a remarkable green landscape owned by others; from that pastoral paradise, she challenges conventional assumptions about African American identity and American space. Zimring interrogates whiteness in reflecting on his family’s migration “out of waste and into whiteness,” as Jewish immigrants who achieved success through urban junk trades and ascended to the suburbs and the white middle class.

Over the past year I introduced selections from these books in two undergraduate courses. Students studying U.S. environmental thought, roughly Puritans to the present, read Finney’s introduction and second chapter “Jungle Fever,” toward the end of the semester, amongst several post-1980 critical approaches to mainstream environmentalism. This initially made sense, given Finney’s bold challenge to culture, representation, and practice within environmental organizations. After several student comments along the lines of “and now we finally got there,” I realized my mistake. No matter its presentism, Finney’s call is to start over from the beginning, and that call belongs close to the start, in conjunction with Winthrop, Edwards, Emerson (he of *English Traits*), Thoreau, and Muir. There, reading Finney alongside Susan Schrepfer’s *Nature’s Altars*, students can bring race and gender to the table, and there Finney’s intervention best transforms the conversation, shifting

⁵ Philip Roth, *American Pastoral* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

it entirely out of whiteness within the context of outdoor recreation and the birth of American conservation.⁶

As for Zimring, this fall in U.S. environmental history, I pushed our reading of *Nature's Metropolis* (not all of it) back one week to first have students read three chapters of *Clean and White* alongside portions of Catherine McNeur's *Taming Manhattan*, and Colin Fisher's 2006 essay on the Chicago Race Riot of 1919.⁷ The combination of McNeur, Fisher, and Zimring anchored the students approach to urban environmental history—New York and Chicago at least—in an understanding of race, space, and inequality. This beautifully set up and enriched Cronon's prologue and epilogue, his green lake and orange cloud framing obscured connections between city and country, unclean and clean, non-white and white. Illusory divisions indeed.

Thus inside and outside the classroom, these new books demand a place at the table, one that acknowledges the pervasive power of race in shaping American environments and other truths as well: the racialized history of both outdoor recreation in “clean” places, and of dangerous, unpleasant labor in dirt and grime relegated to those deemed “dirty” and subordinate; the powerful and ongoing construction of “whiteness” as clean, green, and pure; and the troubling invisibility of black faces in green spaces. I would welcome Finney and Zimring's reflections on each other's work. How might each reframe their arguments in light of what the other reveals of the construction of white and non-white spaces? For Finney: How might Zimring's work further your mission? For Zimring: How might you further extend your analysis of the historical construction of “white spaces” further into the 20th century to address the ways in which non-white communities challenged the ideology of “clean and white” without passing into whiteness itself? We are fortunate that Finney and Zimring have joined a growing community of scholars bringing hidden and not-so-hidden truths and stories of race, space, and environment to light. One could build an entire syllabus; time to get to work.

⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *English Traits* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Co., 1856); Susan Schrepfer, *Nature's Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2005).

⁷ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991); Catherine McNeur, *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ Press, 2014); Colin Fisher, “The Chicago Race Riot of 1919,” in Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll ed., *To Love the Wind and the Rain”: African Americans and Environmental History* (Pittsburgh, PA: Univ of Pittsburgh Press, 2006)

Comments by Richard M. Mizelle, Jr., University of Houston

As a kid I was a member of the Boy Scout Troop 286 in Raleigh, NC. Our troop occasionally attended jamborees where scouts across the region converged in the hopes of being awarded patches and belt buckles that symbolized youthful proficiency in different skills that included tent building, cooking, fire-starting, and rope tying. One of my most vivid memories of being a boy scout was of our camping trips to Grandfather Mountain in western North Carolina. At the end of our 4-hour van ride filled with laughter and stories, gazing out of the windows as the terrain turned noticeably and sometimes unbearably steep, we began setting up our campsite in the mountains.

Time was of the essence as we had to set up all the tents, start the fire, and begin cooking dinner before nightfall. After dinner and all the games we could imagine, we entered our tents armed with our sleeping bags and flash lights amidst strange sounds and noises from the forest. The ground was hard, but we got used to it, and no matter what time of year, it was always freezing in the morning. Having to get out of that sleeping bag in the early mountain hours was the worst kind of torture. We had survived the night from the bears, bald eagles, cougars, and other wild animals, including what we thought must be the sound coming from a Tyrannosaurus Rex closing in on our campsite! In hindsight, we were probably a brisk 15-minute walk from a major highway, but in our minds we were in the most desolate, remote, and abandoned forest on earth.

Troop 286 was an entirely African American Boy Scout Troop (as I write this, I am wondering about segregation and desegregation of the Boy Scouts organization), and I am certain our experiences are similar to the experiences of other scouts and campers.

I became interested in Environmental History in graduate school while writing about the 1927 Mississippi River Flood. Interested in questions of mobility, blues methodology, and resilience of black communities in the face of both natural and unnatural forces in the Mississippi Delta, it dawned on me that having an understanding of environmentalism and environmental history would be useful. From the beginning it was clear that, both past and present, environmentalism writing and activism was reserved mostly for middle/upper class whites and environmental justice designated as addressing the experiences of poor and non-white groups of people only in the 1970s and beyond.

Carolyn Finney's *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* and Carl Zimring's *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States* collectively address the willful engagement of African Americans with the environment and the long history of environmental racism that pre-dates conventional narratives of the movement emerging in the 1970s. Both authors interrogate the language used in the past and

present to racialize African Americans as perpetual “others” when necessary to maintain a discourse of white hegemonic supremacy, and to systematically erase the presence of African Americans when constructing anti-black comfort in natural spaces (more on this later).

Zimring convincingly argues the ways in which metaphors of language are used in the telling of American history, particularly how white skin or whiteness generally has been equated with cleanliness and purity, while black skin is correlated with dirtiness and all things polluted or corrupt. Where immigrants from Eastern Europe were once defined as distinct races subsumed under the so-called Nordic whites, by the early twentieth century those immigrants, in the words of historian Matthew Frye Jacobson, were being brought under the umbrella of whiteness, thereby being spared the treatment of dirtiness increasingly reserved for African Americans during the Jim Crow era.⁸ Carl Zimring spends much of the early part of the book on Thomas Jefferson’s perceptions of the inferiority of African Americans and his disdain for the rise of cities. The evolution of garbage and waste disposal in cities and metaphors of cleanliness and uncleanness with supposed racial characteristics dominates the middle of the book. Unfortunately, there are moments when Carl Zimring does not fully connect his conversation of waste in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with environmental racism. I share the belief that restricting the conversation of environmental racism to the 1970s and beyond ignores how the environment has long been used to discipline and segregate African Americans, but at times the environmental racism part of the argument falls out of the narrative.

Zimring’s book picks up steam with discussion of the Memphis Sanitation Strike in 1968 that ultimately brought Martin Luther King, Jr. to the city. As he points out, the forced proximity to garbage and refuse of African American laborers in the city was historical. Along with the harsh working conditions that included long hours and low pay, working on poorly maintained trucks, and not being able to avoid inclement weather, the Memphis sanitation strike was an issue of environmental racism before the term was actively used. The two African American sanitation workers who died in Memphis, setting off the sanitation strike and signaling the arrival of Martin Luther King, Jr. were crushed to death in the back of a sanitation truck with faulty mechanics. One aspect of environmental racism is, indeed, the inability to avoid hazardous environments, whether toxic chemicals burned in the air, pollutants dumped in bodies of water, or dangerous worksites. The men were looking for a place to avoid the inclement weather and died because of it. If we re-frame the sanitation truck as a singular environment where these men were forced into dangerous spaces that included not only long hours on the truck, but also being simultaneously locked out of many public spaces because of segregation where they might have taken cover during the rain, the deaths become an important way of understanding environmental racism.

⁸ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Scholars of the Civil Rights Movement and Environmental Racism have described the ways in which the ideology and protest tactics employed during the Civil Rights Movement were later co-opted into environmental protests of the 1970s and 1980s, the 1978 Love Canal Disaster and 1982 Warren County, NC protests providing just two examples.⁹ But King, with his interest in the Memphis sanitation workers' strike was in many ways signaling a different approach and direction before his assassination, one that included questions of poverty, housing, and perhaps environmentalism. Zimring seems to be criticizing in part the separation of disciplines in his work. As his work helps bridge the gap between environmental history and race, one question Zimring might address is why there exists such a separation between environmental history and environmental racism. This question has long plagued both fields, and only recently have scholars begun to take on this separation. Addressing this disciplinary question might prove beneficial to both fields and set the stage for more interdisciplinary analysis. Though understated, this question seems to be at the heart of Zimring's work.

Carolyn Finney makes the powerful argument that African Americans have long participated in the Great Outdoors despite early twentieth century conservationist and environmentalist writings and present day advertisements that deliberately absent non-white groups from nature. Memories tied to harsh experiences with slavery, Jim Crow, and racism can have an impact on African American engagement with nature, according to Finney, but an important point she makes is that African American/environmental engagement is not limited to the experience/memory of violence, laboring on the land, and dealing with polluted environments. The experiences of African Americans and nature often operate outside of traditional sources that historians and other scholars press into service to explain historical engagement with the environment.¹⁰ Finney uses her interdisciplinary background to critique the use of dominant archives that hide as much as they reveal to tremendous effect. Novels, poems, and music, for instance, have all informed this engagement, as have the stories told and passed along the generations that have never been printed. Her broader point is asserting the narrative of why African Americans would not engage with the Great Outdoors and is it even possible for them not to. African Americans have always marveled at the beauty of nature, and have fished, swam, climbed, hiked, and found nice spots to court mates and socialize in the Great Outdoors just like everyone else. That some would question this, says as much about the partial telling of history as the experiences of African Americans outdoors.

⁹ Robert Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (New York: Westview Press, 2000); Elizabeth Blum, *Love Canal Revisited: Race, Class, and Gender in Environmental Activism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008); Eileen McGurty, *Transforming Environmentalism: Warren County, PCBs, and the Origins of Environmental Justice* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Richard M. Mizelle, Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014)

To be sure, African Americans' interaction with the Great Outdoors is complicated, and Finney does a masterful job in laying out some of those difficult issues. It is not uncommon for many people to oscillate between fear and excitement when encountering unknown natural landscapes, particularly when those landscapes are also inhabited by potentially dangerous wildlife. Yet, for African Americans, the memory and history of lynching remains vivid and though, as Finney points out, most African Americans during the Jim Crow era and now have never personally witnessed a lynching, the outdoors is still tied to a collective memory as the site where those atrocities often occurred. Scholars have also pointed out the vitriolic history of beaches and pools. I have written that the civil rights era desegregation of beaches in California and Florida were as contested and opposed as battles to desegregate lunch counters and other public facilities.¹¹ Not having access to pools and beaches meant that African Americans were forced to constantly swim in creeks, rivers, lakes, and inlets. The memory of witnessing family and friends overtaken by water moccasins, fighting deadly undercurrents, or encountering sharks close to the shore was seared into the memory of some. Whites encountered nature in this way as well, but they also had more options in the way of municipal and local pools with life guards and well-populated beaches that African Americans did not always have.

Finney does a wonderful job dealing with the production of knowledge around African Americans and the environment, including a critique of advertisements that absented non-white groups from magazines and brochures as well as bias within organizations tied to the environmentalism movement. This is where I found her book the most engaging in ways that move beyond environmentalism and race. The story she tells here is fundamentally about the ways in which normalcy is actively created and maintained.

Media, advertisements, and other public messages play a crucial role in producing knowledge. While scholars have dealt with bias within media, implicit bias within publications dealing with the parks and the outdoors is largely unexplored. Recently, I have been thinking quite a bit about implicit societal messages and what it means in terms of knowledge-making. I attended college at North Carolina Central University in Durham, NC, one of 11 historically black colleges and universities in North Carolina. While in college and beyond, I was always critical of how NCCU's presence was ignored in restaurants, bars, stores, and the airport. As soon as you touch down at Raleigh-Durham International Airport you are bombarded with images of UNC-Chapel Hill, Duke, and N.C. State, but virtually nothing about NCCU. Local restaurants and bars maintain banners of these three predominantly white institutions, and sometimes schools all the way in South Carolina and Georgia, but the subliminal absencing of NCCU, St. Augustine's College, and Shaw University (the other HBCUs in the Raleigh-Durham area) gives the message that they do not exist.

¹¹Ibid; Gilbert Mason, *Beaches, Blood, and Ballots: A Black Doctor's Civil Rights Struggle* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000); Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

Of course they do exist, as do the rich legacies of these institutions. Shaw University is one of the oldest historically black colleges and universities in the country and the place where college students helped form the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in 1960 that organized and spearheaded student protests and direct-action sit-ins across the country.¹² Carolyn Finney is making a similar point about materiality and printed materials ignoring the presence of African Americans in advertisements and brochures, attempting to write a narrative of environmentalism outside the presence of African Americans and other non-white groups.

But perhaps the question that Finney is tangling with is what justification might advertisers have in creating this narrative. The lack of diversity in major environmental organizations is one problem that certainly needs to be addressed. Related is this notion of neutrality. Though Finney does not address this head on, you can almost see the thought process of the natural parks and magazines responding to criticism by implying how their use of white models for advertising is completely neutral.¹³ Finney clearly undermines this idea by highlighting the use of black models in outdoor magazines as often participating in something sports-related or lounging, as opposed to hiking, camping, or mountain-climbing.

Yet it is here where I hoped Finney would push the envelope a bit more to talk explicitly about the “white spaces” she places in the title of her book. It is clear from the writings of early twentieth century environmentalists and the history of Jim Crow that there were certain places and spaces whites expected to visit without the presence of African Americans. This included everything from restaurants and schools to pools, beaches, lakes, parks and mountains. Parts of the outdoors, public in name only, were considered off limits to African Americans. The ways in which language and knowledge was produced around parks during this time period was not neutral, but instead reflected a visible, tangible, and political form of anti-blackness that sought to intellectually and physically purge African Americans (and of course Native Americans) completely out of these spaces. African Americans in nature were considered abnormal to the broader population, but only because of the violence and language used to whiten these spaces. To put it in frankly, the whitening of these spaces and visible removal of non-white groups of people did not, and could never have just randomly occurred. It was not the case then and not the case now that whites are just randomly and neutrally more attracted to the outdoors in comparison to non-white groups of people.

As a question, I wonder if Finney might also address what this kind of knowledge production means for race and the environment outside of advertisements. This

¹²Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹³ On this idea of the neutral standard within medicine, see Lundy Braun, *Breathing Race into the Machine: The Surprising Career of the Spirometer from Plantation to Genetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

perception of African Americans existing outside nature is still prevalent in theory, practice, and subtly historical scholarship, particularly when scholars begin research with the assumption that sources dealing with non-white groups of people are unavailable. I am reminded of the sociologist Natalia Molina's book, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*.¹⁴ Racial scripts are ways that stereotypes and stigmas are unthinkingly reproduced across time and space as a way of reinforcing practices of exclusion, otherness, and un-Americanness. An example of a racial script is the treatment of people of Mexican descent in this country as "perpetual foreigners."¹⁵ The history of the U.S.-Mexico War, the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which provided some Mexicans a path to American citizenship in name but not practice, the bracero program, and rhetoric of immigration around people of Mexican-descent all converge in the racial script that operates to make American citizens of Mexican descent perpetually foreign/immigrant in the eyes of some people today. The rhetoric and script used in the past to describe people of Mexican descent is constantly regurgitated to fit policies and ideologies in the present. It seems that the narrative of black non-environmentalism is re-applied to various social, political, and cultural contexts in our society.

Teaching Race and Environment in the Classroom

I teach a broad array of courses, from specialized courses on the Civil Rights Movement, environmental history, and the history of medicine and science, to the massive 300 student U.S. History Survey Course. To my students' surprise the environment makes its way into every single one of these courses. As Carolyn Finney makes clear, the concept of wilderness and production of knowledge around space is fascinating and one that students often find engaging. Many have visited state or national parks and for some, the idea of wilderness and nature more generally means something untouched by civilization or human existence. The difficulty is getting students to understand human beings operating within, and as a part of nature, and not above or outside for the Great Outdoors to be authentic. Once the process of tearing down some of these misguided notions occurs, we can begin the process of talking about the making and unmaking of knowledge around historical experiences discussed by Carolyn Finney, Carl Zimring, and many others.

Both books are useful for entry level courses on environmental history and courses on the history of race and environmentalism. Finney's book could also be used in lower and upper level courses on African American and United States history because of the ways in which her argument theorizes about race and perceptions of difference. Particularly for those students unfamiliar with environmental history,

¹⁴ Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

¹⁵ Laura Gomez, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

Finney provides an entry point for thinking about problems with the study of environmental history. Her book provides an opportunity for professors to engage students on a number of different aspects of race and environmentalism, and can be used to introduce a wide array of students to the history of the environment. Zimring might similarly be used in courses outside of environmental history, and his argument of the Memphis Sanitation Strike being an example of environmental racism could also be useful in courses on the Civil Rights Movement.

Comments by Traci Brynne Voyles, Loyola Marymount University

In his essay “Black Trash,” Charles Mills outlines a material reading of social contract theory, exploring the role of material space and environmental concerns in the construction of the body politic.¹⁶ As Mills points out, the (ostensibly metaphorical) body politic is both implicitly and explicitly racialized as a *white* body, with particular relations of hierarchized exclusion and inclusion: indigeneity (and Natives themselves) comprise the “outside” of the body politic, envisioned “‘as trees walking,’”—the red and savage space against which civilization constitutes itself but never internal to the polis itself; blackness (and African Americans), on the other hand, comprise a violent and contingent form of inclusion, playing particularly racialized symbolic and material functions. “If,” Mills wonders, “the body politic is to be thought of as literal, as materialized...might there not be illuminating things to be learned about the politics of waste disposal – especially if this flesh [of the body politic] is white (as, of course, a *person’s* would be) and the excreta dark?” The relation of the white body and its “black trash,” according to Mills’ framework, is one that explains two crucial questions explored by Carl Zimring in *Clean and White* and Carolyn Finney in *Black Faces, White Spaces*, which are also questions that environmental historians would do well to bring to the fore: first, *how have enduring patterns of environmental racism* – in Zimring’s book, of waste disposal – *been produced historically?* and second, *why has environmentalism of “green” spaces (parks, wilderness, the “Great Outdoors” writ large) been so persistently white?* “Black relations to nature,” Mills argues, “have always been mediated by white power, the sinews and tendons running through the white body... ‘Environmentalism’ for blacks has to mean not merely challenging the patterns of waste disposal, but also, in effect, their *own status* as the racialized refuse, the black trash, of the white body politic.”

This kind of material and metaphorical reading of race, space, and power provides a bridge connecting these two important books. In *Clean and White*, Carl Zimring traces the history of environmentally racist patterns of waste disposal in the US alongside racialized constructions of cleanliness and whiteness. The content of the book brings together urban history, labor history, and environmental history to tell a compelling story of the role of waste avoidance in shoring up whiteness. To live far from the solid waste that you create, in short, has been both one of the central privileges of whiteness and one of its constitutive features. In a well-researched narrative that spans US history from Jefferson’s presidency through Obama’s, Zimring shows how this negative correlation between waste and whiteness emerged over time, and how waste has been surprisingly central to the racial formation of white, white ethnic, and black Americans alike.

The two presidents, Jefferson and Obama, function as bookends for Zimring, but not in the standard, uncritical sense of the latter fulfilling the promise of the former.

¹⁶ Mills, Charles W. “Black Trash.” *Faces of Environmental Racism: Confronting Issues of Global Justice*, Westra, Laura, and Bill Lawson, eds. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001): 73-92.

Instead, Jefferson and Obama literally embody key features of the racialization of cleanliness and filth, or, to extrapolate more theoretical meaning from these terms, purity and pollution—Jefferson as the father of mixed race children, and Obama as himself mixed race. Jefferson, moreover, served as president at a time when filth was associated more with class, industry, and the space of the city than with race, but the role of slaves in maintaining the cleanliness of white spaces in the South was ascendant. Obama has presided over a country with such deeply entrenched patterns of environmental racism in waste disposal that in the quarter century since the term “environmental racism” was coined to describe the coincidence of toxic waste sites and communities of color, race remains the strongest predictor of hazardous waste siting.¹⁷

What passed in between Jefferson and Obama, and the themes that cohere these presidencies for Zimring—filth, cities, industrialism, labor, blackness and whiteness, purity, and pollution—is the subject of eight highly illuminating chapters tracing the material and cultural traffic of waste and sanitation in the US. I won’t provide a play-by-play summary here, but suffice it to say that the narrative is detailed and the research is comprehensive. Chapter 4, exploring cultural constructions of race, purity, and filth, is particularly powerful, as is Chapter 6, which outlines the causes and massive impacts of suburbanization in the postwar period for spatializing race and resources in the US. Throughout the book, Zimring is keen to several crucial themes: the consolidation of whiteness and white privilege in segregated “clean” spaces; the mostly nonwhite labor that maintained sanitation in those white spaces, often to the detriment of nonwhite spaces and the laborers themselves; and the fluctuating nature of the category “white.” Ultimately, Zimring shows that the boundaries of whiteness were lined, in important ways, with trash. Association with dirt, trash, and filth could be a self-fulfilling prophecy for those who were segregated in spaces without sanitation services, and it could also be pure fiction used to make white people *feel* cleaner by comparison (but, as always with race, this fiction had very real material consequences).

Zimring’s work provides a primer for environmental historians who want to rise to Carolyn Merchant’s call, made in 2003, to tackle the persistent whiteness of the field.¹⁸ Zimring does not hold himself to writing an environmental history that is “about” nonwhite peoples –although that kind of environmental history is certainly necessary. He goes beyond this to write a history of the process of racial formation, showing how the material realities of environment (in this case, waste and urban space), provided an organizing framework for racialization and racial power, even as race consequently shaped how filth and cleanliness were seen by Americans in racial terms. In general, environmental historians who seek to bridge what Patricia Limerick calls “the unfortunate distance separating environmental history from

¹⁷ Bullard, Robert D., Paul Mohai, Robin Saha, and Beverly Wright. “Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty: Why Race Still Matters After All of these Years.” *Envtl. L.* 38 (2008): 371-411.

¹⁸ Merchant, Carolyn. “Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History.” *Environmental History* 8, no. 3 (2003): 380-394.

ethnic history" would do well to follow the lead of *Clean and White*.¹⁹ Such histories would do well to pick up on several tantalizing suggestions in this book about the tensions between the history of solid waste – trash, sewage, scrap, and so on – and toxic chemical waste, particularly as toxic chemical waste has often been used in the “cleaning” process. Whereas the map of race and solid waste is relatively straightforward (Mills’ white body and its “black trash”), I wonder whether the map of race and toxic chemical waste is more diffuse, more difficult to imagine and understand in spatial terms.

In *Black Faces, White Spaces*, Carolyn Finney takes an interdisciplinary approach to questions of race and environment, using cultural geography, African American studies, and environmental history to explore the complex relationship between African Americans and the “Great Outdoors.” In these highly illuminating chapters, Finney explores the whiteness of the environmental movement (Chapter 1), the animalization of blackness (Chapter 2), the role of collective memory and fear in African American reticence about exploring nature (Chapters 3 and 6), hegemonic representations of nature as “white” space (Chapter 4), and racism as a barrier to the environmental movement (Chapter 5). Thus, these chapters and their corresponding themes introduce readers to the major stumbling blocks for African American engagement with the “Great Outdoors” and mainstream environmentalism – as Finney rightly points out, institutionalized racism, the threat of violence, and historical experiences of slavery and antiblack terrorism often undergird the complex relationship between African Americans and environmentalism. Each of these themes deserves careful follow up from historians, and the reach of her analysis can be extended well beyond her primary research site (South Florida), as she demonstrates by applying it to evidence from a range of other places and sites.

For Finney, hegemonic understandings of what constitutes environmentalism, and who is presumed to be an environmentalist, hinge in crucial ways on race. She points out that environmentalists are almost invariably imagined to be white, and these cultural understandings of race and environmental politics both restrict what kinds of environmental activism we recognize *and* deter nonwhite people from seeing themselves and their politics as being explicitly environmentalist. In this sense, environmentalism surely has a *white face*, even as the pernicious structural and cultural tendency to view wilderness as being “for” whites make outdoor spaces like national parks in important ways *white spaces*.

This kind of fluctuating and contested meaning of race and nature made me wonder throughout the book whether its very apt title would have also worked if inverted to *White Faces, Black Spaces*. In many ways, Finney constructs an argument that, despite the long-standing participation of black Americans in environmental activities—from labor to tourism to activism—this history is forgotten,

¹⁹ Limerick, Patricia Nelson, "Disorientation and Reorientation: The American Landscape Discovered from the West," *Journal of American History* 79 (December 1992), 1021-49.

misremembered, or obviated in mainstream environmental narratives. Finney's story of her family home, which serves as a kind of origin story and microcosm for the book, speaks to the ways in which the American environment has been black space in reality, even if not recognized as such, and even when African Americans' intimate engagement with nature has rarely been codified with the privileges of property (such was the case for her family, who never owned the land that they worked and cared for throughout her life). Her family home, like so many other places of the American "Great Outdoors," Florida's Virginia Key Beach among them, can be seen as black space with a white face.

In writing these histories of environment and race, Zimring and Finney both draw on a key contribution of critical race theory: seeing race and racial formation in relational and comparative terms. Zimring's analysis demonstrates the relationality of racial formation between whites, "white ethnics," and African Americans. Finney draws more directly from African American Studies, tracing the comparative experiences of privilege and oppression between white and black Americans. The primary "poles" of racial formation, for both authors, are black and white, and the primary function of white supremacy is antiblackness (which, I think, is appropriate to their research sites). My question for these authors, and for environmental historians who would take up the challenge that their work lays out, is how a black-white axis of racial formation is made more complex in the environmental histories of other nonwhite groups and in other times and geographies? To return to Mills' framework of the white body politic and "black trash," the map of racial formation is triangular: the white body articulates itself through exclusion of indigeneity and through forcible inclusion (what Yen Le Espiritu calls *differential inclusion*, or inclusion for the express purpose of domination and marginalization²⁰) of blackness. In the west and southwest, the primary axes of racial power and privilege have been, at different times and places, anti-immigrant (Asian, Pacific Islander, and Latinx) and/or settler colonial. What are the relationships between antiblackness, settler colonialism, and anti-immigrant Orientalism in shaping the environmental history of the US? As we develop more complex frameworks for understanding histories of humans and nature, we can use books like *Clean and White* and *Black Faces, White Spaces* as jumping-off places for thinking about the diverse and contingent traffic of race and racial meaning in materially and theoretically grounded ways.

Together, these two books extend a powerful invitation to environmental historians to put our shoulders into these two crucial questions about the relationship between environmental racism and the enduring whiteness of "wilderness," in the process asking how historical patterns shape the environmental politics of people of color in complex and dynamic ways. As Mills points out in "Black Trash," and Finney indicates in her work, African American environmentalism has always been informed by the experience of environmental inequality – and in particular, the knowledge that white environmentalism has been in part a romantic quest to seek

²⁰ Le Espiritu, Yen. *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries*. (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 2003): 46-69.

out “pure” spaces unoccupied by the polluting presence of people of color (except the occasional “Indian” on horseback). This does not mean, as Finney points out, that all African American environmentalism is or should be seen as environmental justice – Finney rightly warns us against this assumption, and the ways it serves to racially segregate environmental politics. But both Zimring and Finney, in different ways, give us tools for understanding the highly complex and, indeed, *polluted* histories of nature, race, and power that inform contemporary politics and culture. This kind of scholarship is just what is needed to deconstruct the “white body” (to borrow Mills’ phrase) of environmental politics and to diversify the “white body” of literature that has made up the bulk of the field of environmental history.

Response by Carolyn Finney, University of Kentucky

“Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced” – James Baldwin, I Am Not Your Negro

“Everything is everything” – Lauryn Hill, The Fugees

I am excited and honored to be in this conversation with reviewers Mary Mendoza, Richard Mizelle, Kathryn Morse, Traci Brynne Voyles; author Carl Zimring, and editor Chris Jones. I know that I must address the thoughtful questions put to me by the reviewers as well as consider Dr. Zimring’s book in relation to mine. But before I begin, I want to acknowledge this generative space created by Chris Jones. When I think about what it means to create spaces where different voices can engage differently, where the “canon” of what we know and how we know it is not assumed to be at the center, and where we might extend ourselves beyond our intellectual and creative comfort zones in the service of discovery and possibility, it is incumbent upon me to call it out and show some gratitude. Thank you!

In a similar vein, I will be engaging in a bit of creative cross-pollination in my response. My comments will be informed by two other projects/works that are taking up significant space in my mind. The first is a piece I am working on about the relevancy of John Muir (privileging my perspective as an African American) and the second is my recent viewing of *I Am Not Your Negro*, a film by Raoul Peck that takes the words of poet and social critic James Baldwin and looks at our collective American history through his singular perspective as a Black man in America.²¹ I found a strange symmetry in some of the comments made by Baldwin about the state of America’s race relations and Zimring’s highlighting of Thomas Jefferson’s words that revealed the cognitive dissonance between Jefferson’s own high ideals about the equality of all men and his day-to-day practice of upholding whiteness (expressed in part by the practice of slavery). By starting with Jefferson, Zimring brilliantly reminds us that “progress” in America, often expressed in our technology and practices that we celebrate as indicators of our superiority as a species, is embedded with ideology that is at best littered with misguided assumptions and “facts” and at worst revelatory of our fear of the Other and our greed. While I start with the personal in my book in an attempt to claim ownership over the telling (outing my feminist roots early on) and shift attention away from the dominant perspective (while inviting personal identification by the reader), Zimring goes right to that dominant perspective and lays some of the responsibility for the negative associations about black people and waste sorely at the feet of one of our founding fathers. In a way, he started with “the Man” in a kind of “drop-the-mic” moment that I wish I had thought of. This storytelling strategy provides historical spaciousness in his discussion of race relations and the construction of an environmental imaginary that I believe would have given my own work greater breadth and a way to anchor a

²¹ Peck, Raoul. 2017. *I Am Not Your Negro: from texts by James Baldwin*. Vintage Books: New York.

historical reality that no matter how discomfoting, cannot be denied. The shadow of Jefferson hangs over our present and is a powerful reminder that, as Baldwin says, “History is not past. It is present. We carry our history with us. We are our history” (107). Zimring, through his clear elucidation of our moments of “progress” expressed in our policies and practices designed to improve how we addressed sanitation and waste issues, makes this abundantly clear.

In thinking about the present, I want to address Dr. Mendoza’s insightful comments and question about how historians and scholars might “tackle the paradox of the metaphor of “the table” and how I did not sufficiently “define or decolonize the meaning of the environment or what constitutes environmental work.” Let’s take the second comment first. I have had the privilege of speaking around the country to predominately white audiences about this work/the book for the last two-three years. One of the first things that I say to the audience is that I am talking about the thing (race) and I am the thing itself. There is no separation – I do not have the privilege (nor do I have the desire) of having an unembodied, intellectual conversation about race and the environment. This is true whether the audience is made up of students, my academic peers, artists, community activists, environmental organizations or some combination thereof. Since my goals are twofold – getting predominately white audiences not only to consider our collective American history differently, but also be willing to talk to me about it honestly and consider new practices – my strategy is to meet people where they are. This means that I choose to start with an entry point that the audience might be more willing to engage. The same goes for the book. I was very challenged by how I could talk about “nature”, “the environment”, “the great outdoors” and race without perpetuating the very ideas that I find troubling, and in truth was not satisfied by my little list of definitions and subsequent explanations. But I had to act a bit like Goldilocks (albeit with dreadlocks) and drop some breadcrumbs to lead the reader to some larger truths that I was arguing for to keep folks from shutting down (challenging people’s beliefs, traditions, and unexamined privileges takes a little strategizing). Having said that, I will push back a little on the admonition that the only example I gave of environmental work that challenged the dominant narrative about what constitutes environmental work was about Brenda Palms Barber (Sweet Beginnings). I would like to suggest that all the stories I’ve shared challenge that dominant narrative because they involved African Americans who brought their particular subjectivity, experience, and resistance to bear upon the broader human-environment relationship: a relationship that is grounded in a European, Christianity-based cosmology of the world that reifies whiteness as an integral part of that relationship, expressed in the legitimation of practices that have historically marginalized and/or erased those who do not fit that image. It is their presence (African Americans) as well as their practice that changes the story (as an example, when the book was in draft form one of my reviewers, a scholar whose work I highly respect and whom I know to be white, questioned my inclusion of Tyree Guyton and the Heidelberg project as he did not see it as “environmental”). As I continue to speak and write about our complicated relationship as a diverse people with non-human nature, I am also working on walking my talk better with regards to how I/we understand,

talk about, and represent non-human nature (as an aside I am presently uncomfortable with using the word “decolonize” after reading Eve Tuck’s and K. Wayne Yang’s *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor* and am struggling with how to lean into the challenges that Tuck puts forth).²²

When talking about the metaphor of “the table” I want to do two things: use the example of my book as a way to problematize that metaphor even further and connect to Dr. Mizelle’s great question/comment about “white spaces” and what certain kinds of knowledge production means for race and environment in general. Let’s start with “the table.” I am a person who has been “outreached” to in my life. With good intentions in place, I have been given an opportunity, in light of my diversity and in recognition of embedded biases in all of our systems that keep this country running (for better or for worse) to come to “the table” (I have had two careers and multiple jobs in various sectors including television, fashion and academia). What this usually meant was that since I was given a seat at table, a little room was made to make space for my chair. But, that’s about all that changed. I had to learn the rules of the table, the language of the table, the practices that uphold the table – you get my drift. But the table never had to change. The explicit assumption has always been that the table is never problematic – it’s just the people around it (and even that is debatable). In addition and by default, I have to do all the work inherent in change (the person invited to “the table” generally finds themselves in this position). By writing an academic book as defined by the institution I was in at the time and the larger academic system that codifies and legitimates certain kinds of knowledge, that particular “table” that I was privileged to have access to also has limitations. There is a cognitive dissonance between a process that asks for creative boldness and “new” knowledge while at the same time restricting different ways of thinking, writing and representing that challenges or is unrecognizable to the status quo (the “table” and those supported by it). Furthermore, I was limited by both my formal indoctrination – uh, I mean, education (I’ve been at “the table” for some time) - and a framework and an audience (some academic peers) that did not recognize, value, or know how to engage, in this case, environment, differently. On one level, I had to think in terms that are, in and of themselves, colonizing.

Which leads me to the question/conversation about “white spaces.” The first half of the title of the book, *Black Faces, White Spaces* came out of a conversation I had with a white colleague of mine (shout out to Tom Robertson) when we were both graduate students. I was telling him about an idea I wanted to explore about land ownership, national parks and American identity and what it means to be black when we talk about or think about the environment, and I think he was the one that jokingly said “white spaces” when I said “black faces.” And it stuck. What he grasped was the idea I wanted to get at: the power to name and claim anything, but particularly place and self, is directly linked to being able to claim citizenship, belonging, and humanity in a country that has denied and continues to deny those

²² Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*. In *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* Vol. 1(1), 1-40.

things to people based on their difference (race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender). Whiteness is not a bad thing; as Baldwin says, “Whiteness is a metaphor for power” (107). So when I think about “white spaces” it’s less about pointing to white people and saying “you all did this!!” and more about acknowledging and revealing, as Zimring says, “the social and spatial norms in this country” that are predicated on one group of diverse people privileging and legitimizing a way of life through the subjugation of Others—all in pursuit of preserving the “self-perpetuating fantasy of American life” (84). The opportunity here is for any discipline (environmental history, geography) or academic work that investigates and explores the historical and contemporary meanings of race and the environment (or any piece of that equation) to push the boundaries of who gets to speak to these issues, how that work is articulated, what form that work takes, how that work is evaluated and how that work is disseminated. In other words, we upend the table. *That* is the work. The intention becomes not just explaining or recording history as we understand it; instead, we use our access, our privilege, and our love of learning to extend beyond our creative comfort zones of language and form to not only talk about our challenges and our problems in the world, but also take risks to actually change them.

I want to thank Dr. Morse for her generous comments and respond to the question about how I might reframe my argument based on my reading of Zimring’s work. As I re-read what I’ve written so far, I realize the answer is embedded throughout this response paper. If I were to reframe my argument (and the truth is, particularly in our current political climate, my approach to this topic is rapidly evolving), the reframing I would consider is a more creative one. I am really struck by Zimring’s careful rendering of Thomas Jefferson and I found myself wondering about the nature of a conversation between Jefferson and Baldwin and what it might reveal and how I might, as the storyteller, be more bold in engaging those significant voices as much as I attempted to privilege the voices of “ordinary” Americans when talking about race and the environment. What would their conversation reveal about the history of America, in black and white? Not simply the words they shared, but all those things that – what I like to call *the space between the words* – that are unsaid and sometimes unseen²³. In the book, *Rap on Race*, acclaimed anthropologist Margaret Mead and James Baldwin talk about race.²⁴ Their willingness to have the conversation is as revealing as the substance of that conversation. Baldwin and Jefferson are referencing different historical moments, for sure. But there is something in the breadth of their thinking and depth of their aspiration for the possibility of America that is similar. I’d like to get at *that* (next writing project?). In addition, if whiteness is really about power, how might that exploration reveal the humanity in whiteness?

²³ Finney, C. 2014. *The Space Between the Words*. As presented at the Dimensions of Political Ecology conference (DOPE), University of Kentucky

²⁴ Baldwin, James and Margaret Mead. 1971. *Rap on Race*. New York: Dell

This opens up the space to address Dr. Voyles wonderful question, about whether the title of my book could have been “White Faces, Black Spaces.” I also saw Carolyn Merchant’s “call” in 2003 for environmental history “to tackle the persistence of whiteness in the field.” I was attending my first ASEH conference in Rhode Island and sitting in a sea of predominately white faces, I was heartened to hear her words while immediately becoming extraordinarily self-conscious as one of the few brown faces in the room. “Yeah, that’s right”, I said in my head to everyone in the room, “she’s talking about you, but she is also talking about me.” I was just beginning to embark on my dissertation research which would eventually lead to the book and while I was excited by the possibility of what I might uncover, I was also trepiditious about the probability that “the path was strewn with cutting flints” (to borrow from Robert Louis Stevenson), many of which I had yet to encounter. As I realized that library shelves did not hold all the answers as far as black lives mattered in relation to non-human nature, I knew that how I would write and speak about the research was going to be as important as what I would say. I found myself delving into journals, looking at art, listening to music, and reading poetry to uncover that breadth of black experience in “nature” that was always right in front of us. Those particular “black spaces” of knowledge production opened up whole worlds of living in relationship to nature and from that vantage point, I could begin to see “white faces” differently. But – and this is a pretty big “but” for me – if I stick with the admonition that whiteness is about power, then “White Faces, Black Spaces” conjures up relationships of appropriation, assimilation and relegation. Whether looking at the music industry, fashion, dance, language, or simply style, culture in America is a kind of contested space that cedes to powerful forces like consumerism, capitalism and yes – I will say it – whiteness. It may be the same story told from a different angle, but I think the intention would also be wholly different. Whose story does it then become? And what is “Black space” in America? Was the plantation “black space”? If Jefferson walked onto *his* plantation, whose space is it really?

So I’m seriously digressing now. It’s a rabbit hole, one of those red pill, blue pill moments that yes, I secretly enjoy. But I also want to address Voyles question about the black-white axis and the possibility of me including more fully, other non-white experiences of non-human nature in the U.S. in the book. I did agonize over this decision when writing drafts of the book (and to be fair, one of my reviewers suggested as much). At the time, I was teaching a large course at UC Berkeley entitled “The History of Culture and Natural Resource Management in the U.S.” It was a course that I inherited and like a number of courses at Berkeley, had been given an “American Cultures” assignation that meant that you had to talk about at least three different racial/ethnic groups in the course. I was excited to take this on because it was the largest class in the department (approximately 220 students) and right in my intellectual wheelhouse. But I was a bit astonished to see that the original syllabus didn’t have anything about African Americans in the course. I was a bit flummoxed about how you would teach a course about the history of culture and natural resource management in the U.S. without at least talking about slavery. So I made the necessary changes and moved forward. In the course I included readings, films and discussions about African Americans, American Indians, Asians (with

specific focus on Japanese and Chinese Americans) and Hispanos in New Mexico through the lens of representation, identity, culture and power. I learned a tremendous amount through teaching this course and my willingness to continue to privilege the black-white dynamic in any exploration of race and more broadly, diversity was thankfully thwarted. So expanding the book to consider the broader experiences of Others in relation the dominant environmental narrative would seem to make sense. But the decision to *not* include a chapter or two beyond the African American experience can be traced back to my original motivation for writing the book in the first place. In the beginning of the book, I start off with a brief story about the land I grew up on. I talk about the estate in New York that my parents took care of for nearly fifty years that belonged to a wealthy, Jewish family, and how my understanding of home, belonging, race, class, and environment took root there, informing my worldview and my sense of self. In 2003, about the same time I heard Carolyn Merchant's call to action, my family had to move off that land that they had cared a lifetime for. The original owners had died, a new owner was in place, and my parents were now in their seventies and could no longer work the land in quite the same way. They moved to a lovely house in Virginia (the state of their birth), and while they contemplated a life free from being at the beck and call of others, they also mourned the loss of their home and the land they had cared for and loved. This is the story I really wanted to tell – of love and loss, of ownership, of privilege and power, of race and place and what it means to be unrecognized and forgotten in the larger story about the environment in this country (after my parents moved, a conservation easement was placed on the estate). I also wanted to foreground the "African American experience" as blackness was the lens that was privileged in the house I grew up in and I wanted to honor my parents experience and worldview. So two things are true: I wanted to spotlight African American history and stories, and I did not want to squeeze the breadth of experience of all the Others (each group deserving of volumes of books about their collective experiences) into a single chapter where, in my inexperience, I would risk conflating these diverse lives into the "people of color" category in such a way that would obscure, ignore and even dishonor the complexity of those experiences.

So, let me stop here. Thanks again for the opportunity to stretch my thinking and be in conversation with all of you. Carl Zimring's book has got me thinking of Thomas Jefferson in ways I had not considered before and my creative juices are flowing! I am especially moved by the care each reviewer has taken in sharing their point of view while showing support for both of our voices.

I want to end with Thomas Jefferson and James Baldwin. As Zimring noted, Jefferson "was pessimistic about racial equality" (20). In Jefferson's words, "Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained...will produce convulsions, which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race." Perhaps. But in my optimism and enduring belief in possibility, I return to the Baldwin quote at the top of this paper: "Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

Response by Carl Zimring, Pratt Institute

Toward a More Just Environmental History

I am grateful to have my book included in this roundtable with Carolyn Finney's superb *Black Faces, White Spaces*. I have organized my response in a way that I hope maximizes avenues for further study on the nexus of environmental racism and environmental history. That was a goal of the book, and if I indulge in several references to outside work in these comments, it is in the hope that scholars from within and outside of environmental history will find grounding for new and productive ways to collaborate and communicate.

Speaking of which, I commend Christopher Jones for securing a field of exceptional, ambitious scholars in this roundtable. I urge readers to seek out each of their names in publications (both ones available now and those in press), as all working to advance this conversation in their own work. I thank Professors Mary Mendoza, Richard Mizelle, Kathryn Morse, and Traci Brynne Voyles for engaging my book in a conversation to which each of their voices brings vibrant thinking our field has needed for a long time.

Carolyn Merchant issued her call for environmental historians to attend to issues of race and racism fourteen years ago. Why have environmental historians made so little progress engaging with environmental racism in that time? Structurally, as Professor Mizelle notes, the fields of environmental history and environmental racism have largely developed along separate paths. This is not absolutely true, as several environmental historians have attended to the Environmental Justice Movement, and a few have analyzed the emergence of environmental inequalities prior to the 1982 Warren County protests. Sylvia Hood Washington deserves special mention as a scholar who both dedicated her first book to studying environmental racism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and has spent a decade building up the literature by editing the journal *Environmental Justice*. Professor Washington is an exceptional figure both in her accomplishments and in the fact that we in environmental history have a lot more work to do to build lasting relationships and communication with our colleagues in activism and several of the social sciences that have delved deeper into environmental racism concerns in recent years.²⁵

²⁵ Books that discuss this history include Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Sylvia Hood Washington, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865-1954* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005); Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*. Third edition (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990); David Naguib Pellow, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Julie Sze, *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice* (New York: NYU Press, 2006); Eileen McGurty, *Transforming Environmentalism: Warren County, PCBs, and the Origins of Environmental Justice* (New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 2007).

That said, we have made some progress. The four historians' reviews of these two books reveal how different Professor Finney's framework is from mine. Professor Morse succinctly contrasts our approaches by noting that my book seeks to uncover the historical origins of the very segregation Finney excoriates, and our paths diverge from there. *Black Faces, White Spaces* is an outstanding study of how African Americans have interpreted nature and environmental quality, one that challenges assumed norms of white constructions of nature past and present. I expect many dissertations in the years ahead to adopt Finney's framework and help us better understand the diverse interactions humans have had with nature in American history.

My book has a related, but different goal. If we agree that assuming white perspectives are norms in environmental history is a problem, then we also agree that assuming white perspectives are norms in American history is a problem. My book can be described as a book about "white people" and how environmental conditions shaped definitions of whiteness and white supremacy. *Clean and White* interrogates how whiteness evolved in American history, and the consequences of whiteness's particular construction.

I do so using the framework of critical discard studies. The "lens of dirt" I propose in the introduction relates to the long and interdisciplinary history of work in cultural studies, anthropology, archaeology, sociology, and history that takes concepts of dirt and discard to understand how and why humans organize and discard materials and one another. My thesis in this book is concern about hygiene produced new constructions of white identity in the years after the Civil War, and these constructions in turn have had significant consequences to where waste is sited and who does the work of handling it. *Clean and White* cites an interdisciplinary community of scholars is addressing social inequality and waste work, and readers may also find relevant publications at the Discard Studies website Max Liboiron edits: <http://discardstudies.com/>.

My primary motive in writing *Clean and White* was to advance discussion of the ways in which waste and whiteness intertwine in history, and by the measure of the thoughtful comments from our roundtable, I am delighted by how the conversation is developing, including the critiques. I had hoped scholars would touch upon opportunities for greater scrutiny, and am heartened by these perceptive questions about my narrative. I will elaborate on some of these here and hope that these comments further the conversation.

Using this framework, my depiction of environmental racism is a depiction of how white identity reshaped waste management practices, including occupational structures and spatial reorganization of "clean" and "dirty" spaces nationwide in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is a different history of environmental racism than Dorceta E. Taylor's masterful discussion of communities enduring

environmental burdens in her book *Toxic Communities*.²⁶ *Clean and White* is not a comprehensive history of denying environmental protection to nonwhite Americans, although aspects of such events are touched upon widely. Rather, it is a history about how white identity was shaped to normalize “clean” environments for white Americans. The distinction may seem subtle, but is important. I chose to write with this emphasis because the literature on environmental racism in the United States before the 1982 Warren County protests has grown in recent years; had Andrew Hurley, Washington, and Taylor not written their books, mine might have a different emphasis. These struggles deserve recognition.

That said, focusing on the history of white identity is important. White identity is not static, and understanding how it has been shaped provides important context for the modern Environmental Justice Movement. It also, I argue, poses a much larger role for environmental historians in understanding the history of the United States. If environmental concerns were crucial in shaping white identity, they then play a role in racist practices including not only restricting African Americans from national parks, but also Indian removal, residential segregation, and the occupational inequalities I discuss at length in this book. My hope is this broad application of environmental history will spur work that bridges the gap between environmental history and the environmental racism literature Professor Mizelle identifies.

Within this broad sweep are many historical contingencies specific to particular times, places, and peoples. Professor Voyles’s question about how a black-white axis of racial formation is made more complex in the environmental histories of other nonwhite groups and in other times and geographies is crucial. It is one reason why I focused on constructions of whiteness, as white identity became defined in ways that were not only non-black, but also non-indigenous and xenophobic. Assessing how white power developed in different communities and times – and the effects white supremacy had in those contexts – is not only a rich historical project, but one with relevance for how we attack systemic white privilege in the twenty-first century.

The book’s focus is national, and the most relevant example within it involves the demographic patterns of sanitary occupations in chapters 5 and 7. Though the demographic patterns of sanitary occupations are racialized by the early 20th century, the crucial change was divorcing white identity from waste, in ways that increased environmental burdens for Americans who were not identified as white. Some sanitary occupations overrepresented African American men, or African American women, or Chinese-born men, or Eastern European-born men. After World War II, as I argue in chapter 7, the demographics shift to continue over-representing African Americans, but also Hispanics and Pacific Islanders. My focus on waste work both builds on the attention to whiteness by labor historians and

²⁶ Dorceta E. Taylor, *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility* (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

also provides opportunities for further research; where environmental historians have been especially successful in discussing issues of class and race is in our treatment of work and the environment, and that tradition continues. I look forward to reading Kendra Smith-Howard's forthcoming study of laundry, and suggest that developing more studies of waste labor topics (such as the founding of the Service Employees International Union by African-American janitors) will help us address Professor Voyles's intersectional question in the years ahead.

I agree with Professor Mendoza that the book would benefit from a more expansive discussion of the debates about disease contagion between the 1860s and the turn of the century, and how those debates shaped public health decisions, communities and waste workers in specific settings. My brief discussion of the U.S. Sanitary Commission's work in Chapter 2 could be expanded to include examples from municipal public health agencies across the country as sites where the debates over miasmas and bacteria took place. Within such a framework, engaging with Natalia Molina's book on Los Angeles would bring consideration of how western cities dealt with hygienic fears, allowing comparisons with eastern and southern cities. Michael Rawson's treatment of Boston and Martin Melosi's treatment of Memphis seem particularly well-suited for such a regional comparison with Molina's study with the caveat that race is not an explicit theme in their books. (Here Professor Mendoza's suggestion of Alexandra Minna Stern is a sound one, as Stern's approach to the dynamics of racial identity formation speaks directly to the concerns in *Clean and White*.) My treatment of western communities could also be more expansive than the brief discussions of Los Angeles and Seattle. Readers can look in the footnotes for references to western formations of race, such as Quintard Taylor's treatment of African-American and Asian-American identity building in Seattle, but more can and should be made of how whiteness and environmental concerns interacted west of the Rockies.²⁷

Professor Morse identifies one of the key points I offer for further study. Stopping my periodization before the modern Environmental Justice Movement (as both Hurley and Washington did in their books) offers both historical context for the kind of work Robert Bullard, David Pellow, Julie Sze, and Eileen McGurty (among others) have already done, and also offers opportunity to revisit how the activism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been informed by the historical dynamics I discuss. In what ways does this history lend itself to the "wasted lives" models Zygmunt Bauman, Michelle Alexander, and Khalil Gibran Muhammad use to

²⁷ Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Martin V. Melosi, *The Sanitary City: Urban Infrastructure in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Michael Rawson, *Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016); Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

discuss systemic racism, incarceration, violence, and industry?²⁸ In what ways does this history inform our understanding of the patterns of environmental racism and agency in resisting environmental racism in *Toxic Waste and Race at 20*, the 2007 report that showed the widespread proliferation of Environmental Justice movements in response to the inequalities described in the 1987 report? Finally, how does this history of environmental racism within the United States between the colonial era and 1968 relate to environmental racism beyond the nation's borders?²⁹

The transnational dimensions of environmental racism relate to Professor Voyles's question of whether the map of race and toxic chemical waste is more diffuse, more difficult to imagine and understand in spatial terms. It is. Among many ways to frame this problem is engage with analyses of global waste trading such as Pellow's *Resisting Global Toxics* with the intent of assessing how constructions of whiteness interact with the material consequences of transnational waste dumping and trading.³⁰

Extending Pellow's transnational study to discuss embodied hazards would be part of such a project, and a recent study of food systems provides an opportunity. Susanna Rankin Boehme's *Toxic Injustice* tells a history of transnational pesticide use in Hawaii and Central America. Her treatment of how corporations and governments produced occupational hazards for brown agricultural workers with specific consequences for male fertility offers a model for spatial analysis. The potential for future transnational projects is rich, including the distribution of human-made compounds such as PCBs in waterways and the complex effects disposed polymers and electronics have on peoples and places that transcend political borders. Pathways of pollution are rich avenues for historians to collaborate with our colleagues in geography, and I hope that by establishing the historical context for these systemic inequalities, we can better evaluate the post-1968 period both within the United States and worldwide.³¹

I deliberately ended *Clean and White* before the rise of the modern Environmental Justice Movement for two reasons. First, I argue that the dynamics I discuss are crucial in the formation of the inequalities that shaped the modern movement. Second, where environmental history is especially valuable to activism is in our insistence that historical contingency must have its place in theories of inequality

²⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Objects* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004); Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

²⁹ Robert D. Bullard, Paul Mohai, Robin Saha, and Beverly Wright, *Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty 1987-2007* (Cleveland, OH: United Church of Christ, 2007).

³⁰ David Naguib Pellow, *Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Global Justice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

³¹ Susanna Rankin Bohme, *Toxic Injustice: A Transnational History of Exposure and Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

and justice. Much of the contemporary environmental justice scholarship in sociology and cultural studies focuses on neoliberalism's effects on vulnerable peoples. This frame is valuable but risks obscuring relevant dynamics that evolved before the economic system the Bretton Woods Conference established. Historians are especially well equipped to study these earlier dynamics and bring them into the conversation with cultural theorists and activists. Examining how "white" people became "clean" in the cultural constructions that followed the end of slavery and expanded immigration in the middle of the nineteenth century allows us to see how this construction remains a damaging norm within the United States as well as across the planet in the ways that neoliberal models of environmental exploitation discuss.³²

Doing this requires seeing white identity and racism as dynamic processes, in ways that may seem more self-evident to readers in 2017 than may have been true when I completed the manuscript in 2014. The virulence of white identity politics within the European Union and the United States reshaped political science conversations about relationships of constituents and their representatives. During the summer of 2016, former George W. Bush communications director Tim Miller characterized the Republican Party as "essentially a party that's driven by white grievances and by white — not racial politics, but a set of white identity politics." Self-described germophobe Donald Trump's election as President confirmed Miller's characterization, absent the "not racial politics" caveat.³³

These changes in white identity politics have direct bearing on the present and future of the Environmental Justice Movement. I write this response as the Trump Administration moves to authorize the Dakota Access Pipeline on lands important to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and presents a budget proposal to eliminate the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Justice. These actions are less environmental racism as neglect and more accurately described as active racist malice by the state: they cannot be understood without examining how white identity has evolved. I hope *Clean and White* is of use in building shared discussions amongst historians and activists, and I thank all of the participants in this roundtable for advancing the conversation.

³² This perspective is evident in the environmental racism literature I cite earlier in my response; additional recent examples include JoAnn Carmin and Julian Agyeman, eds., *Environmental Inequalities Beyond Borders: Local Perspectives on Global Injustices* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011); Michelle Garvey, "Toward 'Global Feminist Environmental Justice,'" *Feminist Formations* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2011), pp. 216-223; Gwen Ottinger, *Refining Expertise: How Responsible Engineers Subvert Environmental Justice Challenges* (New York: NYU Press, 2013); Jedediah Purdy, "An Environmentalism for the Left," *Dissent* 62, no. 4 (Fall 2015), pp. 46-50; Joni Adamson, William A. Gleason, and David N. Pellow, eds., *Keywords for Environmental Studies* (New York: NYU Press, 2016).

³³ Clare Malone, "The End of a Republican Party," *FiveThirtyEight* 18 July 2016. <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-end-of-a-republican-party>.

About the Contributors

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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.

Mary Mendoza is an Assistant Professor of History and Critical Race and Ethnic Studies at the University of Vermont. Her current book project is an environmental history of the U.S.-Mexico border and her research explores the connections between racial formation and the environment in the borderlands. Her work has been funded by the National Science Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Smithsonian Institution, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Richard M. Mizelle, Jr. is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Houston and the author of *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014) and co-editor of *Resilience and Opportunity: Lessons from the U.S. Gulf Coast after Katrina and Rita* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2012). He is currently working on a history of race and diabetes from the turn of the twentieth century to Hurricane Katrina.

Kathryn Morse chairs the history department at Middlebury College, where she also teaches in the environmental studies program. Her first book, *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush*, came out in 2003. She is currently working on race, class, and home gardening in New Deal agrarian programs in the deep South.

Traci Brynne Voyles is an assistant professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Loyola Marymount University, and the author of *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015). Her research interests revolve around environmental justice, environmental history, feminist theory and gender studies, ecofeminism, and comparative ethnic studies, and her current book project explores the environmental and cultural history of southern California's Salton Sea.

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