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**Brian McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope: Nature and the Great Migration in Chicago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).
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Introduction by Keith Makoto Woodhouse, Northwestern University

For environmental historians, few areas of study demand more immediate attention than how social difference shaped the relationship between humans and nonhuman nature. Class, gender, and in particular race remain underexamined subjects. Fortunately, a number of recent and some not-so-recent works have placed social difference at the center of their analyses, providing a strong foundation for a scholarly edifice that will only continue to grow.

The shape of that edifice is as important as its size. Scholarly narratives of race and the environment in the United States have tended toward the history of environmental justice, and produced a rich, vital, and urgent body of work. Much of it has focused on how communities of color refused to shoulder a disproportionate burden of environmental harms. That focus has been essential, but it has had the unintended consequence of telling the history of race and the environment—and in particular African American environmental history—overwhelmingly in terms of defending urban spaces against industrial pollution. One result is the bifurcated sense that white environmentalists care about preserving green and faraway places for recreational enjoyment and for the simple sake of preservation, while nonwhite environmentalists battle against toxic assaults on their own communities. An overemphasis on that distinction can contribute to what Carolyn Finney has called “a racialized perception that when it comes to concern for the great outdoors, participation in outdoor recreation in our forests and parks, and the environmental movement in general, African Americans and other nondominant groups are on the outside looking in.”¹

Brian McCammack is at the forefront of a nascent literature challenging the binary view that sees outdoor recreation and rural retreats as exclusively white and that sees nonwhite environmentalism as stuck in a defensive crouch. In *Landscapes of Hope*, McCammack examines black Chicagoans’ manifold experiences with nature in the early twentieth century against the backdrop of the Great Migration and the Great Depression. He describes black Chicagoans playing, working, and recreating in city parks, on rural getaways, and in Civilian Conservation Corps work crews, all the while seeking relief from racism and racial violence, sometimes successfully and more often not. For McCammack, the Great Migration was not a one-way journey from farms to tenements and from the country to the city; even in and around Chicago, African Americans found their way to leafy places where sidewalks ended. Any story, he writes, “that begins and ends with environmental inequalities and battles over urban space, fails to fully account for how and why black Chicagoans experienced, perceived, talked about, valued, and shaped natural and landscaped environments in diverse ways on a daily basis.” (7) In McCammack’s work, that diversity is made clear. The 2018 winner of the George Perkins Marsh Prize as well as the Frederick Jackson Turner Award, *Landscapes of Hope* offers a rich and varied

¹ Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 2.

view of black Chicagoans' experiences, perceptions, and valuing of a nature that they encountered throughout and beyond the sprawling metropolis.

J.T. Roane opens this roundtable by asking what kinds of leisure McCammack describes and what kinds he leaves out. For the most part, Roane suggests, *Landscapes of Hope* is concerned with the sorts of leisure sanctioned by reformers and city officials. How do outdoor spaces look different, he asks, when we take into account illicit activities and pleasures—the kinds of leisure that undermined notions of “proper” or “productive” use of greenspace? **Simon Balto** is similarly concerned with what might be left out of *Landscapes of Hope*, and in particular what is left out when we use “landscapes of hope” as a descriptor for the African American experience in twentieth century Chicago. Given the violence, frustration, and exploitation that marked that experience, Balto asks, what are the limits of hopefulness as a historical frame? **Kimberly Ruffin**, in explaining the intellectual importance of McCammack's book, also asks about its broader impact. New and different stories about African American environmental history are too important to circulate only among academic specialists, she insists. Ruffin wants studies of race and environmental history to matter far beyond college and university campuses, and she outlines several ways in which they might be made to do so. Finally, **Colin Fisher** notes how environmental historians, in criticizing the aggrandizement of leisure as the best way of knowing nature, may have overcorrected; while conservationists have often ignored those who worked in nature, historians have tended to gloss over marginalized groups who play in nature. *Landscapes of Hope* helps address this shortcoming. Still, Fisher asks whether McCammack has overemphasized black Chicagoans' association of urban greenspace with the rural South, underemphasized labor union gatherings as a way of infusing parks and forest preserves with hope, and paid too little attention to gendered differences in how black Chicagoans enjoyed outdoor spaces.

Thanks to all of the roundtable participants for taking part.

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Comments by J.T. Roane, University of Cincinnati

Illicit Leisure and the Politics of the Outdoors

In their classic 1945 study of Black life in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago's Southside, [Black Metropolis](#), Black sociologists St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton included in their chapter on "sex and family" among the neighborhood's lower class, a section detailing the role of "hustling women." For them, despite distinctions outlined by the interviewees upon whom their study was based, hustling women remained for Drake and Cayton a capacious designation. It included women for whom cash and other gifts were exchanged for sex with lower class men through "freebys," women engaged in "turning tricks" habitually with white and wealthy Black men, and "streetwalkers" who multiplied in number during the Depression Era. While some women could afford to maintain shelter and to engage in sex work from the relative comforts and privacy of kitchenettes doubling as brothels, the Depression helped to galvanize and intensify streetwalking in Chicago and across the country as a form of social existence considered by outsiders and "respectable" members of the community alike as destructive and unsavory forms of flesh-for-hire staged *outdoors*.

Although the phenomenon of streetwalking does not figure centrally in Brian McCammack's important new book, *Landscapes of Hope*, I invoke this figuration in order to draw out what I view as a generative tension operating within his account of expressions of identity and politics Black Chicagoans engaged in through the outdoors and nature. McCammack focuses primarily on efforts by what he terms the "Black cultural elite" as well as ordinary Black folks to shape Chicago's parks and beaches as well as other sites beyond the city limits, like camps and resorts. He historicizes their uses primarily as sites for accessing nature towards the ends of recuperation and enrichment. In tension with his concept of landscapes of hope—a formulation that he draws on Richard Wright and the overall thrust of Black migrant aspiration in order to conceive—are forms of Black life, akin to streetwalking, considered unsavory which also appear in the book. For example, in his second chapter McCammack briefly recollects the history of Chicago vice lord and undertaker Dan Jackson. Jackson, made wealthy in part through illegal activity, was drawn to the famous resort town Idlewild frequented by Black Chicagoans of means, to hunt (83). In another example, according to an early 1920s gossip column McCammack recovers, Idlewild was also a site of "wild scenes" and "Bacchanalian orgies" for Black Chicago's political class (81). Throughout the work, McCammack makes clear that while for some, parks, beaches, and camps represented forms of respectable leisure that could draw youth and adults alike away from "the lure of the Stroll's vice and nightlife," (48) others used these spaces—playgrounds, parks, baseball diamonds, resort towns, and the woods— as extensions of *the street*, as spaces for engaging in forms of work and leisure considered antithetical to social order. This tension between "landscapes of hope" and the overlapping frenetic,

seamy, and illicit uses of the [Black outdoors](#) is my concern for the remainder of this essay.

The streetwalking Drake and Cayton described during the Depression in Chicago emerged as a social phenomenon within the context of the early twentieth century, an era in which Progressive reformers had raised alarm for more than a decade about the social and moral status of American life, citing elevated divorce and desertion rates as well as the overall proliferation of what William Kuby terms "[conjugal misconduct](#)." Streetwalking developed in the context of Chicago's Black Belt in an era during which, as [Kevin Mumford](#) and [Rashad Shabazz](#) have shown, police and other agents of the state successfully segregated "vice" into Black communities. Disbanding the widespread operation of brothels, numbers running, and illicit nightlife associated with interracial and [queer](#) mixing like Black and Tans—nightclubs in which people socialized across racial and class boundaries—the police and other agents relied on a cartography wherein Blackness and criminality served as interchangeable keys to understanding and managing the matters of place. As a dissident form, especially in relation to compulsory matrimonial, nuclear familial life, Black streetwalkers represented an [insurgent social formation](#) fundamentally at odds with other forms of existence considered generative and productive.

While street walking partially emerged out of economic necessity, it also helped define an alternative axis of labor, leisure, and pleasure in Black urban life, as Black feminist historians and cultural theorists like [Cheryl Hicks](#), [Lashawn Harris](#), [Kali Gross](#), and [L.H. Stallings](#) have historicized and theorized. Twentieth century Black leisure cultures in Chicago, as well as Philadelphia, New York, and [Washington, DC](#) defied the logics of discrete and ordered labor and leisure, a hallmark of bourgeois visions for social and economic order. Black leisure was often engaged in within the spaces of the street, "distorted" through its blending with improper modes of social connection that resisted strictures of normative gendered identity and sexual comportment, and expressed on off-beat schedules that challenged the temporal order of what La Marr Jurrell Bruce terms [Western Standard Time](#)—the temporal and spatial ordering associated with productivity and profitability under gendered racial capitalism. Indeed, Black communities across Chicago as well as other urban neighborhoods around the nation engaged in forms of gathering or *hanging out* that threatened to subsume productive work into the practices of unsanctioned or *illicit leisure*. Blending unauthorized forms of compensated labor like sex work with forms of enjoyment not condoned by agents of reform, the police, and elites as [proper recreation](#), Black illicit leisure was viewed as a primary threat to urban governance and futurity. Critically, through forms of non-normative and "anti-social" leisure, Black communities staked a spatial claim through the city's underground wherein vitality and social-communal forms often exceeded and contradicted the desire to (re)produce stable, well-rested laborers with predictable patterns of consumption and properly oriented living. The activities of illicit leisure left workers enervated, drove cultures of theft and other practices undermining profitability, and extended a horizon for the future in which

labor was reimagined as a means of extending free time rather than as a means of long-term gain.

In consideration of the work of Black illicit leisure—of street walking and other Black social forms marked as threats to production and normative reproduction in Chicago and beyond—I want to raise a query for the author regarding the notion of “landscapes of hope.” While McCammack has marked one axis of hybridity as vital for his framework—the points of contact between expressions of affinity for the outdoors and nature defined by an imagining and longing for roots in and “returns” to the South—I wonder what productive tension emerges in consideration of another axis of hybridity manifest but largely latent in the book: What happens for thinking and theorizing the Black outdoors and Black working class relations to nature when we consider that spaces for fishing also doubled as sites for teenagers to explore prohibited sex within the tight spatial economy of the dense Southside? Or if we have to theorize Washington Park as a site wherein working-class Black communities drank and fought one another in addition to listening attentively to the stump speech of a communist organizer? How is hope refracted and complicated in consideration of the Black outdoors characterized by this dual hybridity—combining aspects of leisure associated with rurality and the South in a northern urban landscape as well as engaging in illicit leisure in the spaces outlined by reformers and officials for proper recreation?

Comments by Simon Balto, University of Iowa

I begin my comment on Brian McCammack's fine book *Landscapes of Hope: Nature and the Great Migration in Chicago* with a confession. By training, my scholarly homes are in Black Studies and African American History, so I stand before readers as something of an interloper into the field of environmental studies. I thus probably approach McCammack's work from different intellectual angles than my co-commenters and with a somewhat different set of questions in mind. I hope and trust that this enriches our conversation about this important piece of work.

The first Great Migration—the mass South-to-North movement of black Americans in the 1910s and 1920s—looms large in the narrative of the black twentieth century. It dramatically reshaped the content and contours of black politics (and thus American politics), black music (and thus American music), black art (and thus American art), black letters (and thus American letters), and black life (and thus American life). As a result, the migration—as process and event, as experiential rupture for individuals and communities and as demographic reconfiguration for the nation—has also loomed large in historical studies of the black twentieth century. Scholars have explored black migrants' reasons for leaving the South and their reasons for going North (which are related but not the same); their experiences in northern labor and housing markets and schools; their relationships to urban political machines; the backlash they faced from native-born whites and European ethnics in the North; their cultural productions and political imaginations; and the fracture between their freedom dreams and northern realities, beginning immediately and carrying forward through the postwar urban crisis.¹

With *Landscapes of Hope*, McCammack takes an entirely different approach to thinking about the migration. Whereas most writing about Chicago considers the city's physicality from the vantage of street grids and buildings, factories and

¹ For a sampling of Great Migration studies, see Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010); James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Vintage, 1992); Ira Berlin, *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations* (New York: Penguin, 2010). For a sampling of Chicago-specific examinations of the migration era, see James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Marcia Chatelain, *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Christopher Robert Reed, *Knock at the Door of Opportunity: Black Migration to Chicago, 1900–1919* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2014) and *The Rise of Chicago's Black Metropolis, 1920–1929*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011; Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904–1954* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

homes², he considers it instead from the perspective of outdoor areas of leisure and labor that intimately shaped the black experience. Expanding upon Colin Fisher's brief exploration of black interactions with nature in his *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago*, McCammack offers a deep and rich analysis of how black Chicagoans' assorted interactions with nature during the migration and the Great Depression that followed it resonated within their spiritual, cultural, and political lives.³ Riffing off southern migrants' visions of the North as a "Land of Hope," McCammack presents an interpretation of migration history that foregrounds green spaces in Chicagoland—parks, playgrounds, beaches, out-of-town resorts, the Cook County Forest Preserves, Civilian Conservation Corps camps—as "landscapes of hope." In those landscapes, black people leisured, labored, formed communities, forged and reinscribed class identities, constructed radical imaginaries, and navigated the perilous and persistent yoke of white supremacy. Indeed, while black people's relationships with nature were obviously fundamentally *different* in the urban North than they were in the rural South and while those relationships have been generally invisible in the literature, that doesn't mean that those relationships were nonexistent. Instead, as McCammack writes, "migrants' 'kinship with the soil' was never completely severed in Chicago. Instead, relationships with nature were actively reshaped, recast, and reimagined in the city's landscapes of hope." (11)

Landscapes of Hope thus promises many things. More importantly, it delivers upon the promises, and delivers well. The book is deeply researched, clearly argued, and beautifully written. It deftly blends environmental, urban, and social history into a compelling and interesting package. As a fellow scholar of Chicago who used to live in the city and who has spent the past eight years researching, writing, and thinking about black Chicago's twentieth century, I not only learned new things from McCammack's book but thought about others in important new ways.

In the remaining space here, I want to focus my comments on a set of four interrelated issues—black Chicago's community formation, its intracommunal dynamics and tensions, its political life, and what we might consider to be the *limitations* of hope—that reading *Landscapes of Hope* brought to the forefront of my mind.

* * *

The forging of Chicago's famed "Black Metropolis"—shorthand for the black South Side community that took shape during the early 1900s—is a recurring theme in studies of the Windy City. It served as muse and title for St. Clair Drake and

² William Cronon's classic *Nature's Metropolis* is the most obvious exception to this general rule. William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1992).

³ Colin Fisher, *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

Horace Cayton's 1945 magnum opus *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life*—still one of the seminal texts in the field of urban sociology.⁴ Historians of the city have followed in their wake, exploring the various processes by which the Black Metropolis cohered during the Great Migration and what that coherence meant for the people who lived there.

Space was always a critical part of that equation, largely because native-born white and European ethnics fiercely protected their neighborhoods' racial boundaries, leaving Chicago severely segregated and black Chicago clustered into small and overcrowded spatial clusters. We know that story well, particularly as it involved white racial terrorism (beatings, bombings) and government sanction (restrictive covenants and, later, redlining and other institutionalized discriminations). Although the story of the Black Metropolis is one filled with beauty and brilliance, in many ways the racially driven forces of spatial immobility were what first facilitated the Black Metropolis's rise.

But space—and green space in particular—came to bear upon the dynamics of the Black Metropolis in other, sometimes more generative ways. McCammack's first chapter centers the South Side's famous Washington Park, where he explores how community use of the park changed and shifted and took on new meaning as the surrounding neighborhoods underwent racial transition in the midst of the migration. The park was famously a sight of severe racial tension and a flashpoint for racial violence during these years, as white folks sought to defend what they saw as their turf. But it was also a critical sight of community building for black people. The most obvious manifestation of this was the creation of the Bud Billiken Day Parade and Picnic—an annual celebration (started in the 1920s and still going today) that drew tens and eventually hundreds of thousands of revelers in celebration of black pride, black achievement, black spirituality, and black community in a city that generally denied such things even mattered in a meaningful way.

The fact that black Chicago's largest community event took place in a city park suggests the importance of parks to black communal life in and of itself. And the importance of nature in shaping black people's sense of community is a theme that McCammack expands upon in great nuance. There in the green spaces of city parks, black migrants and native-born blacks played, laughed, loved, fought, organized, and did all manner of other things that people do when building community. And having green spaces like Washington Park within easy reach was especially important in easing the transition for rural migrants to their new urban reality. Whether on Billiken Day or throughout the year, migrants could go to the park to reconnect with rural landscapes that they had left behind, and so lessen the shock of the city. "Escaping to Washington Park," McCammack writes, "would have meant the ability to, in some small way, reconnect to the texture, flow, and sensory

⁴ St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993 [reprint], 1945).

experiences of lives and folkways that had been left behind in the South.” (22) The escape was never full and the reconnection never complete, of course. Nevertheless, the importance of these spaces in bettering the lives of migrants, and helping them acculturate themselves to the city, is significant.

If green spaces were sites for community building, they were also places in which intracommunal dynamics and tensions played out, enacted in microcosm. One of the central dynamics of migration-era black urban history was the struggle of middle-class and elite African Americans (often called “Old Settlers”) to reconcile a class status that otherwise would have bequeathed them entry into society’s middle and upper crusts with a racial status that forced them close to the bottom rungs of a racist social superstructure. This routinely led black folks within this social stratum (properly) to critique white supremacy for its artificial narrowing of their palate of social choices. It also, however, routinely led them to lament and even ridicule what they saw as poor behavioral practices by the black poor and working class generally, and of southern migrants in particular, because such behaviors reflected badly on “the Race” and reinforced racist perceptions of what black life looked like. And indeed, in a city as segregated as Chicago, the stakes seemed especially high to Old Settlers given that they were forced to live side-by-side with many of those whose behavioral practices they loathed. But, as McCammack points out, this was not a tension confined to residential streets, nor to common areas such as the famous “Stroll” strip of bars and clubs and other nightlife in the South Side Black Belt. It also played out within the context of Chicagoland’s green spaces, where Old Settlers and black reformers worried about juvenile delinquency and encouraged police to surveil black youth; frowned at kinfolk who played instruments out in the parks of the South Side; and more than anything, worried about how such things “would confirm prejudices and stereotypes but also aggravate the race violence” plaguing city parks and the city more broadly during that time. (49)

The importance of nature in shaping Chicago’s black community also extended beyond the confines of the city itself. The examples here are many, including the establishment of camping excursions for black children in and beyond the Cook County Forest Preserves. Such excursions, community members believed, might be vehicles for molding children’s characters, protecting them from the perils of the urban environment, and steering them away from delinquency.

More arrestingly, nature outside the city offered black Chicagoans an escape from the often extreme racial violence routinely wracking their neighborhoods. In resort communities like Idlewild in northwestern Michigan, for example, Chicago’s black cultural and economic elite escaped real threats to their lives, such as white terrorists’ bombing campaigns against black homes and businesses in the late 1910s and early 1920s. With bombs and beatings as backdrop, getting outside the city into “landscapes of hope” was not simply an abstract exercise in connecting to nature. It was, quite literally, a means of possible survival. And, indeed, in a sad reminder of the relationship between racist violence and nature, McCammack finds black residents of the town of Chicago Heights accepting a policy of racial segregation in

its nearby Forest Preserves in the face of torrential white violence so severe that it seemed better to accept circumscribed access to nature than to risk racist assault within it.

Chicagoland's green spaces were also important in the political life of black Chicago. This was true at multiple levels. On the one hand, South Side parks served as visible, important crucibles in which the radical imaginations of black Chicagoans were developed. This is most notably the case in the context of Great Depression-era Washington Park, which emerged as *the* key locus point of Communist Party-affiliated organizing against racial and economic injustice in early-1930s Chicago. There in the park's vast expanse, thousands of black folks gathered to hear speakers and to use the park as a staging ground from which to wage direct action campaigns against evictions, inadequate relief stations, and other manifestations of the city's punishing system of austerity. Such campaigns yielded limited material benefits for black Chicago at the time. But the ones it had were meaningful—forcing, for instance, the city to halt evictions in the face of avalanching protest emanating from the park and its surroundings.

More importantly, such incidents ramified outward over time, in particularly marking a formative moment in the political education of future leaders within Chicago's black freedom movement. For instance, Dempsey Travis and Timuel Black—both of them middle-school-aged at the time, both of whom would later in life be prominent figures in Chicago's civil rights movement—each “attended the anti-eviction protests in Washington Park with older family members and got early lessons in social justice.” (122) Black in particular remembers that his father used the protests in the park to teach his son “how you were supposed to behave when people mistreat you,” and to “participate in things that brought about justice.” (123) Men like these, and doubtlessly countless other women and men of the black South Side, learned such lessons well. Black went on to devote his entire life to “participat[ing] in things that brought about justice”—as a teacher, writer, and social justice activist. For Travis, the same; he went on to head Chicago's NAACP and coordinated the 1960 March on Chicago that brought Martin Luther King to town for one of King's first demonstrations in the Windy City.

Nature and interactions with it also offered avenues to refute racist constructions of blackness. In places like Idlewild, elite black Chicagoans engaging in traditionally upper-class leisure activities subverted racist conceptions of what was known as ‘black primitivism’—“a school of thought that posited African Americans were inherently, biologically ‘uncivilized’ and thus ‘closer to nature’ than other races. It was a deterministic view that rationalized the exploitative sharecropping culture and racial subjugation more generally.” (63) At the core of this illogic was the assertion that black Americans were innately antimodern and that their relationship to nature must therefore be antimodern and unsophisticated, too. Black elites escaping the city to go leisure rather than labor in nature challenged such assumptions. As McCammack writes, “black primitivist thought simply did not have a vocabulary to understand the black cultural elite's leisure in the rural North's

landscapes of hope....Idlewild and other black resort towns represented a subversive play for racial equality, turning racist ideas about African Americans' supposed proximity to nature on their head and reformulating a relationship with the natural environment that had been fractured by the legacy of more than two centuries of forced labor on the land." (63) Despite its deep and notable classist aspects, black elites embracing thoroughly upper-class forms of leisure in nature directly refuted white racist understandings of what blackness looked (and even could look) like. Engagement with nature, in this light, can be seen as part of a larger push toward greater freedom.

* * *

That being said, I have some questions about the book's framing, most notably about the utility of *hope* as a conceptual organizer here. As *Landscapes of Hope's* title suggests, hope functions as a through line, the idea being that Chicagoland's green spaces offered migrants "the possibility of promises realized: more rewarding relationships with nature in landscapes of hope." (2)

But, of course, if these were landscapes of hope they were also landscapes of terror, frustration, plunder, and exploitation. White people assaulted black people in the Forest Preserves. They restricted black access to the same through both threats of violence and formal segregation. They marauded against black people in public parks and terrorized black swimmers in Lake Michigan (the killing of one black swimmer provoking the infamous 1919 race riot). They forced black children to enroll in separate and unequal camping experiences. And on and on.

Such realities—of the horror that existed alongside the hope—are perhaps best seen here in McCammack's chapter on the New Deal Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps, wherein black men from Chicago performed "mostly manual environmental labor in landscapes of hope: the Cook County Forest Preserves, downstate Illinois farms, and northern Michigan's forests near Idlewild." (201) Although work with the CCC camps afforded enrollees a chance for wage earnings in the throes of the Depression, beyond that, laboring in nature in this case didn't give them much opportunity to reap fruit from the experience. Contrary to CCC ideology, they accrued little in the way of job skills, performing arduous manual labor that was, essentially, "Booker T. Washington's uplift agenda translated to the Great Depression-era North." (209) Moreover, black Chicagoans who enrolled in the CCC program were routinely dispatched to isolated and remote Midwestern locales—getting to be in nature, to be sure, but doing so in areas where white residents were viciously hostile to their presence, including "sundown towns" which banned black entry outside of working hours.

Further, in the context of the labor camps, black engagement with the landscape was not full of hope but instead replicated ugly historical patterns of white communities and individuals extracting material benefits from the labor of black bodies. Consider the case of black CCC workers building the famous Skokie

Lagoons (which the Cook County Forest Preserves still market as “a prime destination for water exploration in northern Cook County”⁵). Black laborers built these lagoons, and by virtue of their placement, the lagoons existed almost entirely for the benefit of white communities that would brook no black residency nearby. The presence of beautiful “natural” spaces (man-made though they were) boosted property values for white homeowners, and continues to do so into the present day. Similarly, black CCC workers who worked on drainage projects, which ultimately lowered the water table and cleared previously unusable acreage for crop growing, *directly* helped build the wealth of whites who owned such land. *Hope* seems a strange prism through which to try to understand this history.

To be clear: McCammack knows that hope was neither guaranteed nor predominant within these landscapes. He emphasizes the Janus-faced aspects of the CCC camps in particular, explicitly asking of them the question that I’d been asking throughout the book—“Were they truly landscapes of hope?” (239) For me, the answer as regards the CCC camps is most assuredly not, and for the rest of the landscapes that McCammack covers, the answer seems relentlessly contingent on the broader social realities at any given time. Sometimes those landscapes doubtlessly embodied and offered profound hope. And sometimes they served as brute reminders of the terribly bridled nature of black freedom dreams in a city like Chicago.

In the end I am left wondering about the utility of hope as a framing mechanism, given the obvious limitations on hope that animated black experiences in Chicago—in nature and otherwise—from the Great Migration onward. Regardless of whether “landscapes of hope” as a concept is the best lens for thinking about black Chicago’s relation to nature, *Landscapes of Hope* as a book is a truly wonderful achievement that sheds valuable light on the history of black Chicago and the Great Migration that shaped it.

⁵ Forest Preserves of Cook County, “Skokie Lagoons,” <http://fpdcc.com/skokie-lagoons/>

Comments by Kimberly Ruffin, Roosevelt University

My interest in Brian McCammack's scholarship on the "landscapes of hope" is manifold. As an African-American whose elders made Chicago their Great Migration destination, I found the meticulously researched and documented history in his book to be a welcome complement to my family's traditions and oral history. For these reasons, I will begin by discussing the emotional legacy of the book.

African-Americans, subjected to repeated racial terrorism without sufficient judicial recourse, have an emotional legacy with nature that is sometimes marked by fear. Dianne Glave reflects on the emotional legacy brought on by the Great Migration in her book *Rooted in the Earth: Reclaiming the African American Environmental Heritage*. She ponders the impact of forced disconnection from African homelands, violent enslavement, and Jim Crow era exploitation, suggesting that, "the legacy of these historical experiences has hardened into yet another stereotype: the ambivalent or apathetic environmentalist, or even the antienvironmentalist. This stereotype is embraced even by African Americans themselves."¹ Racialized violence in outdoor settings, especially lynching, is the prime touchstone of this emotional legacy. The National Monument to Justice and Peace (understood as the National Lynching Memorial) is an important step in confronting this history in the public imagination. However, racialized violence is an insufficient and reductive focus for black environmental history. Likewise, an "antienvironmentalist" response, while an understandable reaction to racialized trauma, abbreviates the emotional legacy and complexity of African-American environmental history.

One strength of McCammack's study is the way in which it provides historical images that reflect the complexity of African American environmental history. The urban migrants in *Landscapes of Hope* repeatedly assert their presence in outdoor space as a way to extend their southern traditions, enjoy life, obtain work, and provide relief from the downsides of the city. While racial harassment and violence did not end with the Great Migration, it could not stop the outdoor activities of African-Americans: city park goers, resort vacationers, summer youth campers, hikers, scouts, swimmers, boaters, anglers, and CCC laborers. As McCammack notes, "In all these spaces, African Americans forged connections with nature despite the racial barriers and violence that confronted them." (196) The accumulative impact of this leisure and labor in the outdoors and the repeated struggles of African-Americans to express their "kinship with the soil" expand the emotional legacy of Black environmental history beyond that of victim. The varied images of Blacks outdoors are immensely liberating, in part because they are so different than the most accessible images of African-Americans: those of the indoor, urban spaces of

¹ Dianne Glave, *Rooted in the Earth: Reclaiming the African-American Environmental Heritage* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010), 5.

popular consumer culture. McCammack's study contributes to the normalization of African-Americans within outdoor space because it documents the relatively recent history of African-Americans seeking out natural spaces in a highly urbanized place.

Another reason why this history is so valuable is that it documents the longstanding and also varied White obstruction to Black access to the outdoors, especially when it required interracial interaction. Academic and popular discourse that grossly exaggerates an "antienvironmentalist" tendency of African-Americans frequently ignores the institutional and individual actions of racist Whites that has resulted in the dominance of European-Americans in public natural space. For this country to move forward with a multiracial environmental involvement, the burden needs to be shifted from people of color simply catching up to the environmental habits of European-Americans, and to open acknowledgement and action around the exclusionary legacies of persistent racism in outdoor spaces.

Another strength of McCammack's work is the interpretation of African-American environmental history beyond the scope of racial divide. McCammack notes, "a story that begins and ends with environmental inequalities and battles over urban space fails to fully account for how and why black Chicagoans experienced, perceived, talked about, valued, and shaped natural and landscaped environments in diverse ways on a daily basis." (7) These portions of the study give texture to the African-American experience and its intracultural differences and cultural traditions outside the purview of racial discord.

It feels good to have the hardback version of McCammack's work sit on my bookshelf with my other scholarly books about the environment. It belongs there. With a meticulously researched and wisely designed study supported by almost 100 pages of thoughtful notes and bibliographic information, it represents a necessary widening of American environmental history. As Dianne Glave noted, "Only recently have African-Americans been considered in the study of environmental history—a history traditionally defined as by and for white men."² *Landscapes of Hope* contributes to the remaking of American's nature narrative into one which benefits from urban spaces and non-white groups.

I am eager to hear what other forms the distribution of this project might take. Let me say first that I believe that the contribution of an academic project that richly documents and critically interprets this subject is inherently valuable. The historical record exposed in this way is crucial. However, how might the lessons contained in this hardback historical gem be transformed for a world fascinated by quickly-consumed, digitally-based (even open access) texts? The urgency of the human community's need to work together inspires this question. As Carolyn Finney stresses, "By linking academic research on race and environment to contemporary events [...], scholars can continue to highlight the necessity to explore a complicated and emotional issue such as race, with honesty, respect, and rigor

² Glave, *Rooted in the Earth*, 6.

(115).”³ McCammack has assembled numerous instances of the urban, human battle over green and “blue” public spaces. What are the lessons about inclusion and conflict for the multicultural, but still mostly European-American, population who control these green and blue spaces now? What would something such as an executive and employee green/blue space management manual say in light of this history? How might McCammack’s work inform K-12 curriculum? How might it re-enter/reinvigorate the public lore, particularly among the African-American community? How can historians provide the deeply textured specificity of the study of a people/community while also insisting that this work has relevance for the human story?

³ Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 115.

Comments by Colin Fisher, University of San Diego

Knowing Nature Through Leisure

In *Landscapes of Hope*, Brian McCammack offers fresh interpretations of the Great Migration and the experience of black modernity and contributes to the growing field of African-American environmental history. He does this in large part by turning environmental historians' attention to the ways that African Americans knew nature not just through work but also through leisure. In so doing, he joins other scholars in making an important theoretical intervention into a field that has often taken a dim view of leisure.

Influenced by the wilderness movement, many early environmental historians celebrated nature romantics, wilderness defenders, and others who enjoyed nature recreationally; at the same time, these scholars often cast aspersions on those who worked in nature. Henry David Thoreau and John Muir were heroes; those who mined, lumbered, farmed, and fished were the villains. But by the 1990s, environmental historians took a far more critical view, painting nature tourism as the environmentally problematic pursuit of the privileged. Teddy Roosevelt's wilderness adventures were no longer a lens on an undifferentiated and exceptional American mind or culture so much as a window on the gender, class, racial, and sexual anxieties of affluent turn-of-the-century white men. Sea World, the Nature Company, and Yosemite National Park offered a unique vantage point not on an exceptional American identity but on the culture of middle- and upper-class white nature tourists hungry for authentic experiences. To gloss Patricia Limerick, books such as Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* that presented themselves as studies of American attitudes toward nature were in fact nothing more than inquiries into the minds of a minority — privileged European-American men.¹

At the same time, U.S. environmental historians blasted outdoor recreation for exacerbating environmental problems. Fetishizing a wilderness park as the only nature that counted perpetuated the sense that cities, suburbs, and even rural areas were fallen and artificial. Leisure reinforced a false dualism between humans and nature and obfuscated connections with ecosystems at home and at work. For Richard White and a wave of younger scholars who followed his example, labor was

¹ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). For critiques of leisure, see for instance Donna J. Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 26-58; Susan G. Davis, *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999). Patricia Limerick, "Disorientation and Reorientation: The American Landscape Discovered from the West," *The Journal of American History* 79 (December 1992), 1021-1049.

a far more revealing object of inquiry than leisure, for work “involves human beings with the world so thoroughly that they can never be disentangled.”²

Scholars inspired by the environmental justice movement also reinforced the critique of leisure. Some U.S. environmental historians explored how the creation of national parks and other landscapes of leisure entailed the forced removal of Native, African, Asian, and Mexican Americans and working-class European Americans, who had long (and often sustainably) used the land for subsistence and work. Other scholars documented how people of color and industrial workers found themselves disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards at home and on the factory floor. Despite environmental justice activists’ call to focus attention on where people of color live, work, and *play*, most environmental historians focused on the first two at the expense of the third. The imperative to document or map environmental victimization and tell the stories of environmental justice activists left little conceptual space to explore how minority communities might enjoy nature.³

Landscapes of Hope as well as the scholarship of Patricia Limerick, Chad Montrie, myself, Connie Chiang, Andrew Kahrl, and Carolyn Finney shows that exploring the places where marginalized Americans played adds an important new dimension to environmental history. We are seeing that, like more privileged nature enthusiasts, everyday Americans often sought out nature during their leisure. They, too, viewed parks as a temporary escape from a seemingly unnatural urban environment and an often monotonous world of modern work. They, too, used landscapes of leisure to remember rural homelands, imagine identity, and build community. To gloss anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, workers and racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities used nature not only to eat but also to think.⁴

² William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness: or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995), 69-90; Richard White, “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?” in Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground*, 171-185. For quote, see Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 7. For two excellent studies that foreground work, see Kathryn Taylor Morse, *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); and Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America’s Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

³ See for instance Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Sylvia Hood Washington, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology Of Environmental Racism In Chicago, 1865-1954* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).

⁴ Limerick, “Disorientation and Reorientation: The American Landscape Discovered from the West,” *Journal of American History* 79 (December 1992): 1021–1049. Also see Chad Montrie, “I Think Less of the Factory than of My Native Dell’: Labor, Nature, and the Lowell ‘Mill Girls,’” *Environmental History* 9 (April 2004), 275-295; Colin Fisher, “African Americans, Outdoor Recreation, and the 1919 Race Riot,” in Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll, eds., *“To Love the Wind and the Rain:” African Americans and Environmental History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 63-76; Chad Montrie, *Making A Living: Work and Environment in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 91-112; Connie Y. Chiang, “Imprisoned Nature: Toward an Environmental History of the World War II Japanese American Incarceration,” *Environmental History* 15 (April 2010), 236–267; Andrew W. Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours: African American Beaches from Jim Crow to the Sunbelt*

McCammack's deeply researched and rigorously dialectical account illuminates how nature remained a potent object of desire for black Chicagoans who had just recently left the rural South. He shows that urban parks, beaches, forest preserves, and wilderness camps were places where black strangers — men, women, young people and old, poor and better off, Mississippians, Georgians, Alabamans, native-born Chicagoans — sometimes came together across lines of difference. At the same time, he demonstrates that park landscapes were also sites of tension that revealed important divisions within the black community. In *Landscapes of Hope*, leisure serves as crucial context for understanding the black experience of knowing nature through work during the 1930s. McCammack chronicles how tens of thousands of black Chicagoans worked in often-segregated Civilian Conservation Corps units that built county and state parks that would disproportionately benefit whites. Ironically, former migrants now did the back-breaking rural labor that they had tried to escape.

Landscapes of Hope is a welcome and important contribution to the field. That said, in the hopes of sparking conversation and refining how leisure can serve as an important window on environmental history from the bottom up, I offer a few reflections and questions that McCammack can choose to take up in his response.

First, McCammack argues that in Chicago greenspaces, black migrants could “reconnect to the texture, flow, and sensory experience of lives and folkways they had left behind in the South.” Chicago greenspaces reminded African Americans of “the rural environments in the South they had traded for the promise of advancement in the urban north.” That Chicago parks could illicit memories of the rural South is a crucial insight into the great migration. His reading supports my own argument in *Urban Green* that immigrants from rural Europe, Mexico, and Asia sometimes used Chicago parks to remember villages, regions, and nations thousands of miles away. Chicagoans perceived their pastoral and wilderness parks as a temporary escape from the industrial city and sometimes as a portal to distant rural homelands. But black Chicagoans' memories of the rural South were far more troubled than Europeans' recollections of the Italian, German, or Irish countryside. As McCammack makes clear, black migrants to Chicago fled not just economic displacement and environmental disasters but racial persecution. A long history of exploitation, violence, exclusion, and alienation made southern pastoralism a deeply fraught endeavor.⁵

South (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Colin Fisher, *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Connie Y. Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire: An Environmental History of the Japanese American Incarceration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 147-174. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 89.

⁵ McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope*, 19, 63-64. Fisher, *Urban Green*, 38-63.

I don't dispute that migrants sometimes imagined the American South in Chicago parks. But what are we to make of the Chicago Garveyites who flew the Pan-African flag (with its green stripe, symbolizing the "luxuriant vegetation of our Motherland") and used Washington Park to remember not the South but a distant African homeland? What about the tens of thousands of black Chicagoans who ventured to Grant Park to see *O, Sing a New Song*, a massive outdoor historical pageant in which 3,000 cast members traced the history of the race not just back to southern cotton plantations but ultimately to an imagined pre-slavery African village set in a harmonious natural setting? What about W. E. B. Du Bois's description of Idlewild as a retreat for "the sons and great-grandchildren of Ethiopia"? Like Chicago Jews who looked past the Russian or Polish *shtetl* to the ancient landscape of Zion that they themselves had never visited, large numbers of black Chicagoans (including thousands of Garveyites from the South) celebrated a glorious African past. We miss in McCammack's book an important dimension of black modernity, namely how industrial Chicago, like Harlem, could be generative of cross-class fascination with African soil.⁶

Second, I think that McCammack could explore at greater length the experience of female migrants as well as their Chicago-born children. For men, a church park picnic was a therapeutic escape from work. But women, who not only worked their day jobs but did the cooking, childcare, organization, and other labor that made such recreational park outings a success, undoubtedly saw things differently. In addition, park landscapes were sometimes the site of sexual harassment and assaults; at the same time, girls and women often used parks and beaches to challenge restrictive ideas of female comportment pushed by community leaders, recreation experts, pastors, and other moralists. Did girls and women see Chicago's landscapes of hope differently than did their male counterparts? How would McCammack respond to Marcia Chatelain's excellent book *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration*? As for the Chicago-born youth: did they continue their parents' southern traditions in Chicago Parks? Did they also see the rural South in Chicago park landscapes? Or did they use landscapes of hope to create a new urban youth culture with different spatial frames of reference?⁷

Third, I would like to see McCammack discuss the labor movement at greater length. He sheds important new light on black communists during the 1930s. He argues that while Washington Park was a landscape where black Chicagoans sometimes formed community across lines of class, it was also a site of militant communist protests that revealed Bronzeville's stark class and political divisions. This is an important insight. That said, the Communist Party was the tip of the

⁶ For quote, see Universal Negro Improvement Association and George Alexander McGuire, *Universal Black Male Catechism* (New York: United Negro Improvement Association, 1921), 37. For pageant, see "Greatest Pageant in the History of the Race Was Staged Saturday," *Chicago Defender* (national edition), September 1, 1934. W. E. B. DuBois, "Hopkinsville, Chicago, and Idlewild," *Crisis* 22, no 4. (August 1921), 159-160.

⁷ Marcia Chatelain, *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

iceberg when it came to black involvement with organized labor during the early twentieth century.

African Americans knew nature through their work on the packinghouse “disassembly line,” which transformed animals into commodities for eaters who wanted to forget where their meat came from. Black workers responded to alienation, exploitation, danger, racism, and monotony in Packingtown’s “worksapces” by seeking escape, pleasure, and solace at places of commercialized leisure, in church, and at Bronzeville’s few parks and beaches. But black workers also responded to industrial work by joining unions. Despite racism from fellow white workers, segregated unions, corporate efforts to foment racial discord, and discouragement from anti-union race leaders, significant numbers of African Americans, including southerners, joined packinghouse unions. During WWI, the Stockyards Labor Council attracted 40% of black stockyard workers. Despite the memory of the 1919 race riot, which badly divided black and white workers on the South Side and soured many on the promise of unions, African Americans enthusiastically joined the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee of the CIO during the 1930s. As Liz Cohen shows, black workers were often first to join and their activism was absolutely central to the successful unionization of meatpacking.⁸

Union efforts to unify workers across ethnic, national, linguistic, gender, skill, and racial divisions and create an industrial working class in Chicago often took place in parks. What are we to make of Davis Square Park, where an interracial crowd of 40,000 workers gathered to listen to Chicago Federation of Labor leader John Fitzpatrick announce victory: “It’s a new day, and out in God’s sunshine you men and you women, black and white, have not only an eight-hour day, but you are on an equality.” What are we to make of PWOC-CIO picnics in the Cook County Forest Preserves, where enormous interracial crowds enjoyed beer, barbeque, played baseball, and danced to a jazz band? What about PWOC-CIO’s extensive efforts to send interracial groups of Back of the Yard children to wilderness camps? For black participants, were not these also landscapes of hope?⁹

Lastly, I think McCammack could give a more nuanced discussion of Frederick Law Olmsted’s and Calvert Vaux’s landscape architecture plans for Washington and Jackson Parks. McCammack argues that in the 1870s Olmsted and Vaux hoped to capture the “restful, dreamy nature of the South” in their Chicago

⁸ On “worksapces,” see Andrews, *Killing for Coal*, 125. On unionization, see James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 208-245; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 291-360; Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904-54* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997). For statistic, see Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 211.

⁹ James R. Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 200. Colin Fisher, “Nature in ‘The Jungle’: Ethnic Workers, Environmental Inequalities, and Subaltern Cultures of Nature in Chicago’s Packingtown,” *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 3 (2015): 344-345.

parks. This sets the stage for the arrival of black park users, who saw the South in the park landscape but in ways entirely unanticipated by the landscape architects. It is worth noting that when Olmsted and Vaux discussed the landscape South, they referenced not Washington and Jackson Parks as a whole but rather the plantings along the lake and water features. Moreover, when they spoke of the South, they meant probably not the American South but rather Central America, in particular the “profuse, careless utterance of Nature” Olmsted witnessed while crossing the Panamanian isthmus on his way to California in 1863. Furthermore, Olmsted in 1892 modified his thinking and told his partners that the banks of the Thames were in fact the model of what he wanted alongside the Jackson Park lagoons.¹⁰

This may seem like a quibble, but by emphasizing the American South as inspiration for Washington and Jackson Parks, we miss a larger story, namely the imposition of aristocratic English parks on the American landscape, including the flat prairies and lakefront dunes of Chicago. Olmsted and Vaux looked south for inspiration, but they found their overwhelming inspiration in the east and in particular in England, where park builders had long tried to recreate for their clients idealized medieval English landscapes as they looked prior to the Enclosure Movement. Washington and Jackson Park were to have tropical plantings, but we should not forget that the landscape architects also planned seemingly limitless swaths of undulating lawn kept short by sheep and cows, irregular groupings of trees and shrubs, a deer paddock, a “Farmstead,” and an 11-acre “Mere.”¹¹

Like other ethnic Americans, Anglo Americans, such as Olmsted, used urban parks to remember distant homelands. But old-stock Americans had the power to use tax money to create their English parks (and later wilderness parks on the city outskirts). By contrast, marginalized Chicagoans had to do the imaginative work of transforming the landscapes of the dominant culture into something that made sense to them. That they turned pastoral English parks and Cook County Forest Preserve wilderness parks into spaces to remember rural Germany, Italy, Poland, Mexico, the Philippines, or Mississippi is a testament to the extraordinary creativity of everyday Chicagoans.

None of the above undermines McCammack’s central argument. Far from it. These additional dimensions of the African American experience with nature in and

¹⁰ McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope*, 17. See Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, “Report Accompanying Plan for Laying Out the South Park,” March 1871, reprinted in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Writings on Public Parks, Parkways, and Park Systems*, (Supplementary Series Vol 1), ed. Charles E. Beveridge and Carolyn F. Hoffman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 206-235. Frederick Law Olmsted to Ignaz Anton Pilat, September 26, 1863, reprinted in Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and Theodora Kimball, *Forty Years of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1973), 343. Frederick Law Olmsted to John Charles Olmsted and Henry Sargent Codman, July 19, 1892, reprinted in Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: The Last Great Projects, 1890-1895*, (Vol. 9), ed. David Schuyler, Gregory J. Kaliss, and Jeffrey Schlossberg (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 548.

¹¹ Olmsted and Vaux, “Report Accompanying Plan for Laying Out the South Park.”

around Chicago only strengthen his thesis that nature was central to the experience of black modernity. This is an excellent book that I hope will serve as a model for additional research on how new arrivals to cities (both in the United States and elsewhere) knew nature through work and also through leisure. Such scholarship will help us see marginalized people not just as environmental victims but also as three-dimensional historical actors who creatively used places they saw as natural to make meaning, build community, and resist oppression. Additionally, this research will help us build new and much-needed bridges between environmental history and labor, ethnic, African American, migration, and social history, all fields that stress the agency and creativity of everyday people in the face of inequality, exploitation, poverty, violence, and oppression.

Response by Brian McCammack, Lake Forest College

First off, I'd like to thank all the reviewers for their extremely thoughtful engagement with *Landscapes of Hope*, as well as the roundtable's editor, Keith Woodhouse, for assembling such a stellar group and shepherding the process along. I love H-Environment Roundtables because they're such a rare and unique venue for in-depth conversations about new and exciting work in the field, so it's a real treat to have *Landscapes of Hope* as the subject of one. Honestly, I can't recall having a similar opportunity to discuss this project at such length with a group of scholars since my dissertation defense, so this roundtable is a lovely way to bookend the six-year process of the dissertation maturing into the monograph.

I'll begin with Simon Balto's question about my use of "hope" as a unifying conceptual lens for the book since it gets to the heart of my argument about the environmental significance of the Great Migration. The critique is well taken, especially since much of the book concerns the *lack* of hope black migrants were often forced to confront in northern landscapes; as Balto rightly says, "if these were landscapes of hope they were also landscapes of terror, frustration, plunder, and exploitation." Perhaps *Landscapes of Despair* would have been more accurate. But more than a riff on James Grossman's *Land of Hope*, the seminal study of the Great Migration in Chicago (itself a reference to how Chicago and other migration destinations were seen by many as the "Land of Hope"), the book's title and conceptual theme aims to emphasize migrants' agency and capture their lofty aspirations—to understand, environmentally speaking, what made Chicago a "Land of Hope" to thousands upon thousands. One key argument, then, is that nature, as migrants understood it, should join other, more well-studied facets of black northern life that gave them cause for hope: labor, education, religion, and so on. What I attempt to uncover in *Landscapes of Hope* is how and why nature mattered to migrants, showing that access to nature was more than a proxy battleground over racial equality. Like a good education, dignity in labor, the freedom of religion, nature was a good in and of itself.

More broadly, I thought of hope as a useful unifying theme to help me understand Chicago's natural and landscaped environment from the perspective of migrants themselves, in that particular historical moment—akin to the way Isabel Wilkerson did in *The Warmth of Other Suns* (itself an optimistic title that riffs on migrants' hopes for a better future).¹ African American historians reading about the Great Migration know what migrants will face in cities like Chicago. We know that

¹ Incidentally, my attempt to understand Chicago's green landscapes as migrants understood them in the interwar era was also the rationale for defining "nature" the way I did in the book. As environmental historians, we know that "nature" is more complex and varied than urban parks, rural resorts, and so-called "wild" places. But those are the green spaces I mostly write about in *Landscapes of Hope* because I think the evidence shows that's the way black migrants (as well as many, many other Americans) thought about "nature" in the interwar era.

the deck will be stacked against black migrants every step of the way, and we know that migrants will endure forms of white supremacy in the North no less vicious and insidious than what they faced in the South. We know, too, that migrants and their descendants will be forced to contend with the emergent “second ghetto” and the urban crisis after World War II. All of those things hamstrung migrants’ ability to forge the environmental relationships they wanted to forge. But when you know how the story ends (or at least what happens in the next few chapters), the outcome can seem inevitable, and it can be difficult to imagine how migrants would have been hopeful when stepping off the train to Chicago’s South Side. Yet hope for what awaited them in the North—along with the fear and hatred of what they left behind in the South—was what drove millions of migrants to cities like Chicago.

Take as an example Richard Wright, who serves as a touchstone for the book in many ways. As angrily disillusioned (and rightfully so!) as the Richard Wright who published *Native Son* in 1940 was, it took him more than a decade of dashed hopes in Chicago and New York to get to that point. The young aspiring author who arrived in Chicago in 1927 wasn’t a wide-eyed naif by any means, but neither was he as cynical about black agency and the possibility of effecting racial change in America as he would eventually become. Like many migrants, Wright knew the South held no hope for him when he fled it. Chicago, though, was still a “Land of Hope” for him when he arrived in 1927; nearly twenty years later when he expatriated to Paris, it was anything but. In effect, the narrative I crafted in *Landscapes of Hope* attempted to balance the way Richard Wright (and thousands like him) saw Chicago’s natural and landscaped environments when he was a migrant fresh from the South with the way he saw them more than a decade later; in so doing, there is more hope—and possibility, contingency, agency—infused into the narrative than might be expected.

Given the critique of “hope” as a conceptual lens, it makes sense to me that Balto dwells on *Landscapes of Hope*’s last chapter (which examines black Chicagoans’ experience in the Civilian Conservation Corps) because the book’s roughly chronological narrative in some ways traces an arc of diminished hope as migrants arrive and—sometimes gradually, sometimes abruptly—realize Chicago falls well short of the ideal. The promise, possibility, and advancement of the “New Negro” in the 1910s and 1920s gives way to the strife of the Great Depression and federally-sanctioned race segregation and discrimination in the 1930s. As Balto points out, in many ways segregated CCC companies in the North “replicated ugly historical patterns of white communities and individuals extracting material benefits from the labor of black bodies.” I felt strongly about expanding that material into a standalone chapter in the book (it had been lumped in with Depression-era experiences in rural leisure spaces in the dissertation) because, much more than other chapters, it directly raises vexing questions about similarities between black environmental *labor* in the North and South. Perhaps more than the other two Depression-era chapters, it helps vividly illustrate the way environmental relationships factored into the sort of frustrations felt by African Americans like

Wright and W.E.B. Du Bois over how white supremacy had stymied migrants' progress in the North.

Whereas Balto is primarily concerned about the ways in which “landscapes of hope” were impacted by interracial relations, I’ll take up J.T. Roane’s and Colin Fisher’s reviews next, because both critiques zeroed in on the first thing I’d revise in *Landscapes of Hope* if given the chance: more adequately examining the diverse ways the idea of “landscapes of hope” functioned intraracially. To varying degrees, both question the extent to which the book does justice to the depth, nuance, and diversity of the African American community, arguing that I perhaps hew too much toward the masculine middle- to upper-class understanding of nature as espoused by black reformers and institutions like the *Chicago Defender*—and not enough toward women, the working-classes, the labor movement, and consciousness of the African diaspora. While I don’t think those critiques undermine the core arguments of *Landscapes of Hope* (and I want to point out that the book does devote substantial space to examining diversity within black Chicago along lines of gender, class, and more), I do think it’s reasonable to suggest the narrative falls short of capturing the full range of black Chicago’s environmental consciousness. That’s something I’m particularly sensitive to as a white man writing African American history. As an historian you always want to get it right, and as an outsider to the African American community, that was especially important to me; I wanted nothing more than to do justice to the rich complexity of the black environmental experience. Perhaps it’s a poor explanation, but those shortcomings were primarily borne of the constraints and realities inherent in monograph writing—in this particular case, balancing the interracial and intraracial dimensions of the story, balancing breadth and depth when fleshing out the contours of that intraracial story, balancing an overwhelmingly imbalanced historical archive, balancing the environmental and African American historical perspectives, and balancing the urban and rural dimensions of the story.

Roane, in particular, encourages closer examination of the “tension between ‘landscapes of hope’ and the overlapping frenetic, seamy, and illicit uses of the Black outdoors.” I think this critique is especially trenchant because one of the key ideas in *Landscapes of Hope* is that we should regard public green spaces—and the many ways black urban dwellers utilized them—in much the same way we regard other, much more well-studied elements of the built environment (like “The Stroll,” black Chicago’s entertainment district) that, among other activities, played host to “illicit leisure.” Although I dwell on the class and respectability politics at work in the ways diverse segments of black Chicago used public green spaces—especially the anxieties ignited among middle-and upper-class reformers about the behavior of working-class youth—perhaps the closest I come to examining that “illicit leisure” head-on is via a close reading of the poetry of Frank Marshall Davis, which figures Washington Park as a refuge from the “urban jungle” of the built environment for *all* elements of black Chicago. But obviously—as I make clear at other points in the book—that formulation is a bit reductive and optimistic in the way it minimizes intraracial tensions driven by a wide range of behavior in and use of public green

space. All in all, I think Roane is right that I probably could have done a better job reading between the lines of archival materials that are overwhelmingly skewed toward the perspective of middle-class reformers who policed that “illicit leisure.”

I’m especially glad Colin Fisher contributed to this roundtable because there’s probably no environmental historian who knows this period of black Chicago’s environmental history better. His article on the subject in Dianne Glave’s & Mark Stoll’s *To Love the Wind and Rain* was inspirational at the dissertation stage, his monograph *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago* is an excellent multi-racial/multi-ethnic treatment of many of the same issues I examine in *Landscapes of Hope*, and he’s been a generous colleague and co-panelist at every stage of the project. So given what Fisher knows, it’s not surprising to me that he, like Roane, urges a greater sensitivity to the diverse ways that diverse groups of black Chicagoans understood and experienced public green spaces. In particular, I regret the missed opportunity to highlight how many black Chicagoans’ understandings of public green spaces were inflected by an awareness of the way nature mattered to their African ancestors. And when Fisher points out that my examination of interracial Communist activity in Washington Park is “the tip of the iceberg when it came to black involvement with organized labor during the early twentieth century,” he’s absolutely right, just as he is when he suggests there is more to be said about “the imposition of aristocratic English parks on the American landscape.”²

But let me pile on my own monograph, so to speak, and suggest that *Landscapes of Hope* is the “tip of the iceberg” of Chicago’s black environmental culture in many more ways than even Fisher suggests. For instance, because I felt it was important to put urban public green spaces in conversation with rural/ex-urban sites like Idlewild, Michigan, and the Cook County Forest Preserves in order to emphasize black Chicagoans’ little-known environmental experiences outside the city, there was less room for exploring the full range of environmental connections

² As the project evolved, less and less space was devoted to the nineteenth-century landscape architectural history of many of Chicago’s key “landscapes of hope” in favor of illuminating the African American experience in those spaces decades later. But let me briefly address Fisher’s points about Olmsted’s and Vaux’s desire to “secure a combination of the fresh and healthy nature of the North with the restful, dreamy nature of the South” in their design of what became Jackson and Washington Parks. Fisher is absolutely right that that passage primarily concerns water features in the Lower Division of South Park (which became Jackson Park) and that my framing perhaps lends too much weight to the interpretation that the “South” they refer to was the American South rather than Central America. There is some ambiguity there, however, and Olmsted’s voluminous writings reveal that his impressions of landscapes in both regions bear some similarity—and for good reason, since elements of the American South bear some resemblance to Central America, especially as compared to Chicago’s environment. Regardless, while I do concede that the broader context of Olmsted’s and Vaux’s deployment of the North/South dichotomy was probably worth at least a footnote, I think the general point still stands: their objective of creating a breathing space in a dense urban environment still speaks to the unique challenges black migrants would eventually face upon settling in Chicago, oftentimes after moving from more rural landscapes in the South.

in *either* urban or rural/ex-urban locales. Along with Lake Michigan beaches, I chose to primarily use Washington Park (a 371-acre Frederick Law Olmsted-designed park in the middle-class area of the Black Belt) and Madden Park (a 10-acre park built in the heart of the working-class Black Belt thanks to black Chicago's activism) on the South Side of Chicago to explore those urban connections in depth and give readers a sense how varied connections to public green spaces could be. And, true to my interdisciplinary training in American Studies, I wanted to offer a textured narrative about the black environmental experience in those spaces by incorporating a great deal of analysis of cultural production, from Richard Wright's fiction and non-fiction to Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* to Archibald Motley's painting and more. But doing so meant I virtually ignored other important city parks and playgrounds, especially those on the West Side of the city like Douglas and Union Parks, which in turn meant that I effectively omitted an entire segment of Chicago's black community from the narrative. By the same token, my focus on Idlewild and the Forest Preserves surrounding Chicago (which was to some extent a choice that stemmed from where the richest archival resources led me) meant that I excluded countless other black resorts and recreation areas outside the city proper. And although I think the case for focusing largely on leisure spaces—based mostly on the argument that black Chicagoans' thought of nature mainly in terms of leisure—is strong, that choice meant that I virtually ignore the environmental resonance of black migrants' home lives (including foodways, gardens, yards, etc.) as well as work lives (in stockyards, steel mills, domestic service, etc.) that earlier versions of the project (at the dissertation stage, and even deep into revisions) examined. On top of all that, save for an exceedingly brief epilogue, *Landscapes of Hope's* narrative ends prior to the much more massive wave of black migration that dramatically changed Chicago and other Great Migration destinations beginning in World War II. I could go on and on this way, pointing out the various ways that unexplored dimensions of the story would have added even more depth and complexity. But all of that and more was sacrificed in service of a more focused and coherent monograph of a reasonable length, and at the end of the day, I don't think any of it fundamentally changes the core arguments of the book.

I say all this not in the spirit of self flagellation or defensiveness, but to point out how remarkably complex and rich black environmental culture is, and how much historians have yet to uncover about it—even after more than a decade of sustained inquiry that has produced a lot of great work. Multiply the Chicago story in *Landscapes of Hope* by the hundreds of Great Migration destinations, and the scale of the overall story—even in this relatively tiny corner of African American history—quickly becomes mind-boggling, and is a testament to just how much work remains to be done at the intersection of race and the environment. It really is the tip of the iceberg. That's in part why I'm continuing to explore these dimensions of black Chicago's urban environmental experience in subsequent projects, and I'm glad Kimberly Ruffin invited me to think concretely about the public history dimensions of this project. Because if there's so much left for historians to understand about black environmental culture—and there certainly is—in many ways there's even more of a gap in understanding in the general public. There's a

mountain of scholarly literature—much of it in sociology and related fields—about racial bias, misperceptions, and stereotypes at the intersection of race and the environment (Paul Gobster, Research Landscape Architect with the U.S. Forest Service, is one of many researchers who has examined these issues in Chicago, and Dorceta Taylor stands out among many who have written extensively about the way this plays out nationally). These questions have a lot of bearing on things like urban planning, community development, and institutional culture in the 21st century, and I think historians have a lot to contribute to these discussions that tend to focus on the here and now. So in some ways this is a question about simultaneously bridging disciplinary boundaries and reaching beyond the ivory tower.

I wasn't trained as a public historian (like teaching, I suspect most of us figure it out as we go) but I'm committed to translating historical insights to the general public, and I think part of that is simply being as visible as possible—reaching out and showing up. Putting in the time, and listening as much as talking (which the small bit of oral history I completed for *Landscapes of Hope* helped teach me)—these are things that are doubly important when you're an outsider to a community, as I am. That community engagement is somewhat easier because I'm fortunate to live in Chicago, and to this point my efforts have centered around working with institutions that figure prominently in the book—like the Forest Preserves, the Park District, and more—to build more of an awareness of their own historical role in the city's black environmental culture. Last year, a [Black History Month panel](#) sponsored by the Forest Preserves of Cook County and Roosevelt University (which Ruffin moderated) put me in conversation with [Arnold Randall](#), the General Superintendent of the Forest Preserves, and [Veronica Kyle of Faith in Place](#), an organization that among many other initiatives, promotes the "[Migration & Me](#)" program that "engages people of faith in sharing their personal migration stories, connecting their stories to migration of other species." Kyle spoke powerfully on, as Ruffin puts it, the "emotional legacy" of centuries of fear and intimidation that racial and ethnic minorities have experienced in public green spaces. Then, just a few months after that panel, the Forest Preserves came under fire after a [viral video](#) showed a Forest Preserves police officer failing to intervene when a woman wearing a Puerto Rican flag shirt was verbally harassed by a white man. A month later, under investigation by the Forest Preserves, the officer resigned and [General Superintendent Randall's statement](#) made the Forest Preserves' commitment to diversity and inclusion abundantly clear—a far cry from the Forest Preserves of the 1930s that promoted segregation as a way to quell racial discord. Knowing that history and owning that history can inform an institution's actions in the present in productive ways.

Perhaps most relevantly to Ruffin's question about translations or transformations of academic work to broader, more general audiences in a "world fascinated by quickly-consumed, digitally-based (even open access) texts," I think visually-rich, map-based (GIS and the like) projects hold promise for their wide legibility. Using the 1960s photography of Raeburn Flerlage archived at the Chicago History Museum, for instance, I situated black Chicago's blues culture in the built

and landscaped environment in a project I called [Mapping the Blues](#), under the auspices of Lake Forest College's "Digital Chicago" project, a Mellon-funded digital humanities grant. Doing so allowed me to weave events like the Bud Billiken Day picnic in Washington Park—about which I write extensively in *Landscapes of Hope*—even more tightly into the fabric of leisure life on the South Side than I was able to in the book. The Chicago History Museum hasn't taken up an African American and/or environmental historical subject for its [Chicago00](#) app yet, but the augmented reality format that uses smartphone technology to layer historical photographs on top of street scenes while users are in the field would be ideal for urban environmental history applications. Another similar project on which I've been collaborating is an augmented reality smartphone app targeted specifically at young people on Chicago's South Side. Led by community members and supported in part by the Chicago Park District and the Field Museum, the digital humanities project aims to bridge historical and ongoing racial divides between the city's South Side black and brown neighborhoods by linking public green spaces in adjacent Latinx and African American neighborhoods via a walking tour. Similar resources that provide an historical lens on "the normalization of African-Americans within outdoor space," as Ruffin puts it, are increasingly common. In Chicago, for instance, a significant portion of the archival amateur video from the [South Side Home Movie Project](#) reveals black Chicagoans in the sorts of landscapes I examine in the book, albeit after World War II (and was featured in a [panel this past summer](#) titled "Parks as Contested Spaces").

Suffice it to say that there's a great deal of exciting work going on in black environmental history—both inside the academy and outside it—and I feel privileged to be part of that growing field, just as I feel privileged to have *Landscapes of Hope* featured in this roundtable. In closing I want to once again thank each of the reviewers, whose keen insights promise to push the field's continued work at the intersection of race and the environment in immensely productive directions.

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