

a Native response to the suffering experienced in the reservation era, with Indian people using the trickster to examine their condition and find ways to survive. Tracing the changes in the stories one can document an ongoing Native American analysis of colonial domination. What is particularly attractive about this idea is that one can start the investigation with Native texts and Native cultural categories.

A Forest of Time represents Nabokov's effort to synthesize decades of reading in multiple disciplines. The breadth of his source material alone makes the book highly valuable. In a sense, Nabokov has created a body of literature, since he has brought heretofore scattered works into conversation with one another. That is a

significant feat, but the book is even more important as a call for future scholarship. If this reviewer's experience is any indication, researchers in Native American history will come away from *A Forest of Time* with ideas for starting new projects and refining old ones. Those in American history, meanwhile, should be inspired to bring Indian perspectives into their treatments of other peoples' pasts. With grace and imagination, Nabokov reminds us how much Native American cultures can contribute to our understanding of life on this continent.

ANDREW DENSON is an assistant professor of history at Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina.



Down to Earth
Nature's Role in American History
 By Ted Steinberg

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Pp. xiv, 347. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$30.00.)

Environmental historian Ted Steinberg concludes his *Down to Earth* with a warning: "When it comes to the human control of nature, beware: Things rarely turn out the way they are supposed to. The wind shifts, the earth moves, and now and again, when you least expect it, a flock of birds swoops in for a meal" (p. 347). Those few lines summarize Steinberg's argument that a full understanding of American history requires that we portray nature as an active player and

not simply as a backdrop in the evolution of human society over time. Social historians argue for writing history from the bottom up; Steinberg contends that history also needs to be written "from the ground up."

Writing history in this way, Steinberg explains, demands that historians rethink the time periods that they use to organize and interpret the past. From this perspective, three turning points mark the history of America. First, with more than a nod to the

work of Alfred Crosby, Steinberg argues that European arrival in North America precipitated a profound ecological transformation, as two continents isolated for millions of years were suddenly “reconnected.” Europeans began an ongoing, accelerating process of moving and mixing plants, animals, and micro-organisms around the world, with profound consequences for both natural and human history. Steinberg’s second major turning point is the rectangular survey promulgated by the Land Ordinance of 1785. “The grid,” he argues, “was to the rationalization of nature what the Declaration of Independence was to freedom” (p. x). The final transition comes with the rise of consumerism in the late nineteenth century. Commodification of nature, Steinberg concludes, was the single most significant force in shaping and reshaping the natural world.

Steinberg organizes *Down to Earth* around these turning points. Part I, “Chaos to Simplicity,” addresses Native Americans and their environment and the dramatic transformations following European contact. Part II, “Rationalization and Its Discontents,” examines the century after 1790 with a focus on land, agriculture, and resource extraction. Part III, “Consuming Nature,” considers the environmental consequences of the development of a modern consumer culture in the United States. An accomplished and insightful historian and the author of several previous monographs on American environ-

mental history, Steinberg skillfully draws upon his own work and an impressive body of related literature to offer a useful overview of the historical interplay between people and their surroundings. The careful citations and an extensive bibliography will prove quite helpful, the index is well organized and useful, and ample illustrations reinforce the text.

While it would be possible to debate the fine points of the author’s interpretation, *Down to Earth* offers a well-written, interesting, and insightful examination of American history “from the ground up.” Steinberg is an excellent scholar who also knows how to tell a good story. *Down to Earth* offers a good read for anyone interested in an overview of American environmental history, and it should also work quite well in a variety of history and environmental studies-related classes.

PHILIP SCARPINO is an environmental historian and a public historian who chairs the Department of History at Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis. His most recent publication, co-edited with Martin Melosi, is *Public and Environmental History* (2004).

