

CITY, COUNTRY, EMPIRE: LANDSCAPES IN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY, JEFFRY M. DIEFENDORF AND KURK DORSEY (EDS). PITTSBURGH: UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH PRESS, 2005; PP288 + VIII, PHOTOGRAPHS, NOTES, BIBLIOGRAPHY, PAPERBOUND.

Jeffrey Diefendorf and Kurk Dorsey's edited collection of essays, *City, Country, Empire: Landscapes in Environmental History*, is ambitious in undertaking to broaden the relevance and appeal of environmental history for historians and provide significant directions and challenges for the field. At the heart of the collection of fifteen essays is the examination of the way human societies create concepts of nature and work with them to expand ideas about cities and landscapes.

By dividing the thoroughly researched, strong essays into the topics of cities, countryside and empire, Diefendorf and Dorsey illustrate the diversity of current research in environmental history whilst at the same time establishing a continuum amongst it as they take the reader from 'specific urban settings, to broader suburban and rural areas, to an international context.' (p2) The editors' comprehensive introduction presents a useful overview of the development of the field of environmental history over the past three decades in America which provides a helpful context for the essays. Equally, introductions at the beginning of each of the three parts of the collection also serve to tie together the themes of city, country and empire.

Taken together, however, the essays explore topics that are larger than the sum of their parts. In this respect, the editorial arrangement of the essays is not as effective as it could be, as the essays are also connected through a number of alternative themes. Four such themes which are prominent in the collection are, firstly, the concept that nature is a force that cannot be overlooked, a significant and persuasive theme, especially considering the editors' comment that nature 'has not penetrated the mainstream of historical thinking to the same extent that race, class, and gender have' (p1). Secondly, ideas on the re-use of land are specifically explored, for example in Ursula von Petz's essay on the restoration of the Ruhr Valley. A third theme looks at contentions surrounding ideas of land attachment, as explored by Elizabeth Blackmar in 'Of Rights and Reits', where she argues that real estate investment trusts reflect absentee ownership and sever connections to the land by putting development in the hands of corporations, thus removing responsibility from the community. And lastly, the idea of the environment as interconnected through process and systems that are on-going and dynamic is a significant theme that runs throughout all of the essays in the collection while being specifically explored in Andrew Isenberg's 'The Industrial Alchemy of Hydraulic Mining'.

Given the editors' emphasis on the importance of the internationalisation of environmental history and the call by the eminent founder of the field, Alfred Crosby, in

the 'Afterward' for environmental historians to widen their considerations from the local to the global, some might find the fact that the essays are predominantly focused on American environmental history somewhat surprising and parochial. The editors' introduction, 'Challenges to Environmental History', does, however, provide a necessary widening of the context for the essays, and the discussion of the internationalisation of the field as illustrative of its development and vitality outside America is welcome here. Environmental history by its nature lends itself to exploring the local with a global perspective and in this respect historians will be able to consider the significance of some of the essays for the Australian context. Nancy Langston in 'Floods and Landscape in the Inland West', for instance, explores the complex and contested relationship between farmers, ranchers, irrigation developers and scientists over water rights in the changing landscape of Oregon's Malheur Basin. Her essay raises questions about how human responses to flood plains and waterways have shaped landscapes and identities, questions that are equally relevant and significant in Australia. Specific to Australia, too, is Thomas R. Dunlap's 'Creation and Destruction in Landscapes of Empire' which examines the interaction between Anglo-American settlers and the landscapes of Australia, New Zealand and North America, and argues that settlement is a continual process of both a natural (physical) and psychological nature.

In the 'Afterword' to the collection, Crosby proposes that 'the greatest challenges facing humans in general in this new millennium are environmental in nature' (p232). While historians of the environment have been answering Crosby's call to understand the relationship of humans to their physical and living surroundings for some time now, the collection reinforces this need and at the same time opens up the relatively recently defined discipline of environmental history to the history profession more generally, emphasising its relevance and interdisciplinary roots. In this respect, the collection is a valuable resource for anyone who seeks to understand how environmental change and ecological processes dovetail with human and non-human histories whilst more specifically providing a well researched and broad ranging introduction to the field of environmental history.

ROSE SEARBY
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY