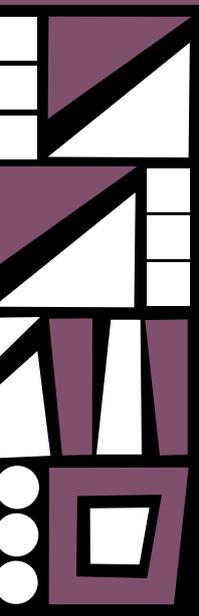




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***NATURE AT WAR: AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTS AND WORLD WAR II***  
**Edited by Thomas Robertson, Richard P. Tucker, Nicholas B. Breyfogle, and Peter Mansoor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.**  
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*Nature at War: American Environments and World War II*, edited by Thomas Robertson, Richard P. Tucker, Nicholas B. Breyfogle, and Peter Mansoor, presents a compelling and transformative argument: World War II was not merely a geopolitical struggle among nations but a pivotal environmental event that fundamentally reshaped the American landscape. Moving beyond conventional military and political histories, the volume contends that the war effort required an unprecedented mobilization of natural resources—an effort that accelerated industrialization, altered ecosystems on a massive scale, and bound the United States to new and often damaging relationships with its environment. Importantly, the environmental consequences of this mobilization were not incidental by-products. Rather, they were integral to achieving victory and produced long-term legacies that defined postwar America, from suburban expansion to the rise of the nuclear state. The book's twelve chapters collectively explore these transformations, offering a holistic vision of the environmental dimensions of total war.

The narrative opens with the large-scale physical transformations imposed on the American landscape. Massive infrastructure projects, such as the construction of the Alaska Highway, required clearing vast forests and blasting through mountains to establish strategic supply lines. These physical upheavals were compounded by government seizures of more than twenty million acres for military bases, training grounds like Fort Hood, and secret weapons testing facilities, including Dugway Proving Ground and Los Alamos. Such interventions displaced local populations and disrupted ecosystems, demonstrating that environmental change was not a side effect but an active component of wartime strategy.

The book also examines the intense extraction of natural resources required to fuel the “arsenal of democracy.” The insatiable demand for metals created a mining boom that scarred the American West, while the parallel need for oil powered the Allied war effort and cemented a long-term national dependency on petroleum, laying the groundwork for the car-centered culture and suburban sprawl of the postwar era. Agriculture, too, was transformed. Farmers became “soldiers of the soil,” adopting intensive, chemical-dependent practices that boosted wartime output but caused soil erosion and pollution. By examining these multiple layers of environmental change, the volume underscores that the war fundamentally reorganized human interaction with nature on both local and national scales.

One of the volume's greatest strengths is its expansive and innovative conceptualization of environment. One chapter investigates food as a weapon, analyzing how rationing, Victory Gardens, and propaganda connected civilians directly to the war's environmental imperatives. Another explores the distribution of cigarettes as military rations, arguing that wartime practices normalized smoking and produced long-term public health consequences. The book further documents the direct environmental damages of industrial and military production, from radioactive contamination at the Hanford site and along the Columbia River to the pollution of the Gulf Coast from intensified shipping and oil refining. The chapters in this volume effectively argue that these transformations were not unique to the United States but reflected a broader global phenomenon generated by total war.

The volume's interdisciplinary approach—blending military, environmental, and technological history—is particularly compelling. The contributors convincingly show that the environment was not merely a backdrop but an active participant in the war effort, reshaped and exploited to meet the imperatives of conflict. The scope of the subject is remarkable, encompassing everything from microbes and cigarettes to oil fields and atomic reactors, thereby offering a truly holistic picture of the war's environmental impact. Equally impressive is the book's attention to the long-term consequences of wartime policies. Chapters addressing oil dependency, the nuclear legacy at Hanford, and the chemical transformation of agriculture clearly demonstrate that decisions made between 1941 and 1945 established environmental trajectories that shaped the United States for decades, linking wartime imperatives to the origins of many contemporary environmental challenges.

Beyond its major contributions, *Nature at War* points to several important areas that merit further scholarly exploration. The social dimensions of wartime environmental change, including the intersections of race, class, and labor, emerge as particularly rich avenues for investigation. While the volume touches on the displacement of communities and the labor of wartime workers, questions remain about how environmental mobilization differentially impacted Indigenous populations, communities of color, and working-class laborers in mines, factories, and other sites of production. Similarly, the global dimensions of environmental transformation during World War II invite further inquiry. Although the book gestures toward broader patterns, a more integrated comparison of the American experience with the environmental devastation in Europe, the Asia-Pacific theatre, and other regions could deepen our understanding of total war as a transnational environmental phenomenon. These threads suggest a fertile research agenda for historians interested in connecting environmental, social, and global perspectives on the war.

In conclusion, *Nature at War* stands as a pioneering and essential contribution to the historiography of World War II. It convincingly demonstrates that the conflict was a critical turning point in American environmental history, forcing a rapid, large-scale reorganization of the nation's relationship with its natural resources. The book's central achievement lies in its synthesis, showing how wartime imperatives reshaped landscapes, production systems, public health, and the broader contours of modern American life. While deeper engagement with social history and a more global framework would have strengthened the volume, these shortcomings do not diminish its core accomplishment. By redirecting attention to the literal ground on which the war was fought and won, *Nature at War* offers a vital model for understanding the total, multifaceted nature of modern warfare.

For scholars and students of history, environmental studies, and international relations, it provides an indispensable lens through which to examine the profound environmental transformations catalyzed by World War II.