

Study Guide #2, 9/20-9/22: Health and the Environment

- Wood, William. *New England's Prospect* (1634). Edited by Alden T. Vaughan. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977. pp. 25-31.
- Flint, Timothy. *The History and Geography of the Mississippi Valley. To Which is Appended A Condensed Physical Geography of the Atlantic United States, and The Whole American Continent*, 3rd Edition. Volume I. Cincinnati: E. Flint, and Boston, Carter, Hendee, and Co., 1833. pp. 35-40, 199-201, 223-224, 298-299, 331, 407-408.
- Kupperman, Karen Ordahl. "Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience." *William and Mary Quarterly* 41 (1984): 213-240.
- Valencius, Conevery Bolton. "The Geography of Health and the Making of the American West: Arkansas and Missouri, 1800-1860." In *Medical Geography in Historical Perspective*, ed. Nicolaas A. Rupke. London: Wellcome Institute Trust for the History of Medicine, 2001. pp. 121-145.

Just like last week, this week's readings included a mix of primary and secondary sources. This week the distinction is more straight-forward. There are two primary sources (Wood and Flint) that show you how people in the 1630s and the 1830s thought about health, disease, and the environment. Then there are two secondary sources written by historians (Kupperman and Valencius), that analyze primary sources to try and reconstruct what disease theories were, and what impact they had on the lives of colonists and settlers.

Your goals as readers depend on the type of reading. For primary sources, try and put yourselves in the shoes of the authors to appreciate and understand their view of the world. For secondary sources, figure out what the author is arguing (i.e. what point they are trying to make), what kinds of sources they are using (i.e. is there data appropriate), and whether you think they are convincing.

New England's Prospect: Even though he wrote one of the best descriptions of early Massachusetts, little is known about William Wood (e.g. when he was born, his family background, etc.). He seems to have sailed to Salem in 1629, spent four years in Massachusetts, then returned to England in 1633, where he wrote and published this book. The excerpt you will read is the opening chapter. He starts with a description of the geography and climate of Massachusetts Bay (including Cambridge) -- does this match your own experience here? Wood thinks that New England is a healthy match for English bodies. How does he think environment and bodies interact? He admits that mortality was high among early settlers (p. 28), and that winters and frostbite have been problematic. How does he explain away these problems to maintain his faith in

the healthfulness of the climate? How does he compare the healthfulness of New England and Virginia (pp. 31-32)? While his claims about the absence of smallpox, measles, and consumption (tuberculosis) are not consistent with the reports of other colonists, there are others who, like Wood, describe sickly people in England becoming healthy in New England. To understand Wood's claims, it is important to recognize why this book was written (p. 25). Does this make you question his reliability? "Spin" was not the creation of modern media consultants...

History and Geography of the Mississippi Valley: Timothy Flint was born in Reading, Massachusetts, in 1780. He graduated from Harvard College in 1800, became a Congregational minister, and preached in Lunenburg from 1802 to 1814. After a falling out with his congregation (a result of his experiments on chemistry and metallurgy), he went west and spent eight years as a missionary in the Ohio and Mississippi river valleys. His extensive travels eventually broke his health. In 1825 he returned to Massachusetts to devote himself to literature and writing. Moving between Massachusetts, Cincinnati, New York, and Louisiana, he wrote a series of articles and books about the history and geography of the Mississippi valley, the Indian wars, Daniel Boone, natural history and geology, and a series of works of fiction. He died in Salem in 1840. The selection on the syllabus is a collection of brief excerpts from his very long book about the Mississippi valley. This book was written, in part, as a guide to people interested in settling this area. To get oriented to the whole book, scan the table of contents (pp. 5-9). The first excerpt begins on the bottom of p. 35 and goes to the top of p. 40. Why does his section on disease immediately move into a discussion of landscapes? What makes land healthy or sick? How does settlement (clearing land, planting crops) affect the health of the land? After this introductory section, we have included five selections about the health of different states (Florida, Alabama, Missouri, Illinois, Ohio). As you read these, focus on the discussions of climate, disease, populations, and not the other material on some of the pages (crops, seminaries, etc. -- but if you are interested, on p. 408 he describes the ruins of the mound civilization I mentioned in lecture on 9/13). As with the Wood selection, do his descriptions of the climates and healthfulness of these states ring true with what you know about these states? Many of the disease names might be unfamiliar (pleurisy, cachexy, bilious fevers). Identifying the diseases and symptoms is less important and understanding his ideas about the causes of disease. Flint makes an interesting claim on the bottom of p. 35: "Where the lands are extremely fertile, it seems to be appended to them, as a drawback to that advantage, that they are generally sickly." Is this based on science, religion, or common sense? What were the sources of medical knowledge in this time period?

"Fear of Hot Climates": Karen Kupperman is a leading American historian, now at NYU. She has published many books and articles about colonial American

history, covering English colonies in the Caribbean, Carolinas, and Virginia, and the interactions between colonists and American Indians. This article explores the disease theories of early colonists, focusing on English colonists moving to the Caribbean or southern North America (e.g. Carolinas, Virginia) in the 1600s and 1700s. How were colonists misled by latitude (e.g. England is at the same latitude as Newfoundland)? Why were they so frightened of heat? How was the sun both a source of wealth (p. 218) and danger? How did colonists at the time understand the process of acclimatization (also known as seasoning)? Kupperman also provides a modern medical explanation of acclimatization (p. 220, p. 223); is this helpful? How did promoters of settlement try to market the climate of these areas (pp. 224-225)? How did colonists try to mitigate the effects of heat by changing their diet (e.g. alcohol, sugar, peppers, etc.), work habits, clothing, home design (e.g. to minimize risk of spontaneous combustion, p. 233)? How did the colonists eventually come to feel safe and comfortable in these areas?

“Geography of Health”: Conevery Valencius is a historian who has studied perceptions of health and the environment as American settlers moved from the Atlantic coast into the American interior in the early 19th century. Just as English colonists feared moving to Virginia or the Carolinas in the 17th century, American settlers feared moving from the northeast or southeast to points further south and west (she focuses on Missouri and Arkansas) in the 19th century. Settlers needed both to choose a healthful destination and to take precautions to ensure health while their bodies adapted to the new climate. The interactions and parallels between body and environment extended to therapeutics: just as doctors drained blood from people who were sick to make them healthy, farmers drained water from swamps to produce fertile fields. Her goal is to make a modern reader understand how a 19th century settler thought about land. Does she succeed? Notice what kinds of sources she uses -- few are written by doctors. How do the theories of health and environment in the 1830s compare to the ones from the 1630s or 1730s described by Kupperman? How can you account for both the stability of this worldview over such a long time frame, and its increasing sophistication over time?