2015 | *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5 (3): 235–250

COLLOQUIA

The cultural politics of water in the Everglades and beyond

Transcript of the Lewis Henry Morgan Lecture given on October 14, 2015

Jessica R. Cattelino, *University of California, Los Angeles*

The Hau-Morgan Lectures Initiative
A Hau and University of Rochester Collaboration

Introduction

The Florida Everglades, a vast and slowly-flowing subtropical freshwater marsh, have meant many things to many people.[1] I list some now, in order to introduce both the place and its stakes. To nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century white settlers the Everglades were a seemingly impenetrable swamp to be conquered and drained. To

1. This public lecture was directed to a public and mostly-undergraduate audience. I am enormously grateful to the faculty at the University of Rochester—especially Daniel Reichman and Robert Foster—for inviting and hosting me and for their sustained engagement with my work in various forums. As always, I thank the people of South Florida who have taught me so much. Out of concerns about ethics and image reproduction, only two of the forty-two slides shown during the lecture are reproduced here. Others will be available in the Duke University Press book in the Lewis Henry Morgan series, while still others will be viewed as part of the exhibition "Getting the Water Right," which is a collaboration of the author with photographer Adam Nadel.

ISSN 2049-1115 (Online). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.14318/hau5.3.013

nineteenth-century Seminoles they provided shelter and military advantage during the devastating Seminole wars with the United States. For mid-twentieth-century farmers they offered reclaimed rich organic soil that provided the eastern United States with fresh winter vegetables, contributed toward food security for a nation at war, and made possible, as a World War II-era brochure put it, "the natural garden of America." For Black, white, and Latino farm workers over the last century, the Everglades have beckoned migrants as workplaces but too often brought injustices. In the 1960s the drained wetlands offered a new home in sugarcane production for Cuban exiles, as the United States made Florida sugarcane a national prerogative. In the 1940s, they offered to advocates the first national park dedicated to the preservation of biological processes rather than monumental scenery.

For Seminole and Miccosukee Indians today, the Everglades remain spaces of indigenous sovereignty. For environmentalists, they are a unique subtropical ecosystem on the verge of collapse, a test of humans' chances for a future on this planet. For real estate developers, the swamps beckon as untapped opportunity. The Everglades offer famous bass fishing, alligator and other hunting, bird watching, cover for drug smuggling, material for nature photographers, and plenty of fodder for political grandstanding. Many to most of South Florida's seven million coastal residents do not know that they have the Everglades to thank for meeting the water needs of their households and businesses. For diverse residents of small rural cities, farms, and the Seminole Big Cypress Reservation, this is home and livelihood.

For anthropologists, the Everglades offer much to think with. I am writing a book that examines what the residents of a 20x40-mile region in the northwest Everglades understand of and value in water, and how those practices enact political belonging. The project focuses on the Seminole Big Cypress Reservation (pop. 600) and the nearby agricultural town of Clewiston (pop. 7,000) on the south shore of Lake Okeechobee, as well as agricultural and water management areas in between. It is based on extended field research in 2012 and years of shorter-term research stints.[2]

The Everglades includes most of Florida's southern half. There (see Figure 1), water slowly traveled southward on a sheetflow over one hundred miles along a limestone shelf from Lake Okeechobee to the Florida Bay. Water overflowed the lake's shores during the summer wet season, when the late afternoon skies pile up with storm cells and the rain falls loud and hard. Since the mid-1800s, Everglades politics have been dominated by three settler imperatives: to make land agriculturally productive; to develop a permanent residential population; and, more recently, to restore the Everglades. Drainage and flood control have allowed major coastal development, cattle ranching, large-scale vegetable production, Florida citrus, and the growth of the sugarcane industry that now dominates Clewiston and surrounding areas. After a half century of efforts to restore the Everglades, it is clear to me that saving the Everglades is as much a social and cultural project as a scientific or political one.[3] In the context of post-humanist anthropological interest in non-

2. Research was funded by the National Science Foundation research (#1122727 as PI; #DEB-1237517 as senior personnel), the Wenner-Gren Foundation (#8293), and the Howard Foundation.

3. As anthropologist Laura Ogden, author of the book *Swamplife* (2011: 1–2), has compellingly demonstrated, whereas generally humans in the Everglades have been

humans, my work focuses on the human stories of restoration and from there theorizes a kind of critical humanism.

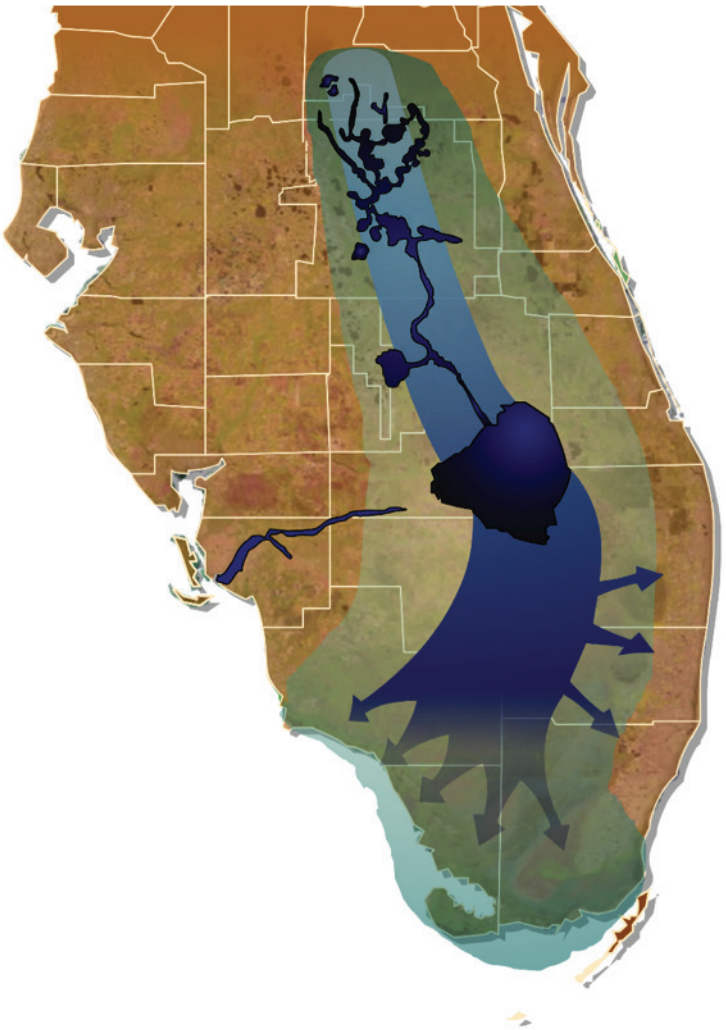

Figure 1. Historic Everglades flow, as depicted by the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan[4]

Tonight, I offer one way into understanding the significance of the Florida Everglades far beyond the swamp, and that is consideration of the cultural politics of water, with focus on settler colonialism.

understood as outside of and changing nature, this landscape can be reclaimed as "a place of people and human history."

4. Downloaded 12/4/15 from http://141.232.10.32/maps/waterflow-maps/flowmap1-historic.jpg.

Cultural politics and settler colonialism

What does it mean to emphasize cultural politics? It means attending to cultural practices like making meaning of nature, classifying it, and representing it, while also tracing how these cultural practices distribute resources among human groups and individuals. I am concerned with the ways that human communities incorporate water into their understandings and expectations of each other as peoples and polities, especially at this moment when water use grows globally at twice the rate of population growth, and it is predicted that by 2025 two-thirds of the world's population will live under water stress conditions.[5]

There is no better place to think about the cultural politics of water than the Florida Everglades. This is a young ecosystem (only 5,000 years old) that never existed before people were there. Archaeological evidence pointed out to me by the Seminole Tribe's historic preservation officer suggests that the Everglades' iconic tree islands may have been anthropogenic, created by people.[6] Tonight I focus on one aspect of the cultural politics of water in the Everglades, and that is the way that water and nature take distinct forms that can only be understood by thinking of the United States as a settler colonial society. In the United States, nature and indigeneity are coproduced in patterned ways.

Before turning to how this works, let me pause on the concept of settler colonialism. By settler society or settler colonial society, scholars refer especially to the liberal democratic settler states of the former British Empire—specifically the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—where indigenous peoples are demographic minorities, and where indigenous claims to sovereignty and differentiated citizenship create dilemmas for the liberal democratic project. These are the four nation-states that initially refused to adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Historian Patrick Wolfe (2006) differentiates settler colonialism's target of land dispossession (and indigenous elimination) from the expropriation of labor in dependent colonies. I hope it goes without saying that emphasizing the ways that we live in a settler colonial society does not preclude or displace other ways of categorizing the United States (e.g., as a slave state, migration state). But I hope to convince you that if Americans began to think of this as a settler colonial society much would newly come into view for analysis and for change.

Theorizing settler colonialism can call attention not only to the ongoing salience of settler coloniality for indigenous peoples but also to the ways that settler colonialism structures, shapes American lives even when indigenous peoples and issues are not directly implicated. By settler I sometimes refer to individuals, but even more to structural positions that people can move in and out of. Nature is an apt domain to examine these processes for several reasons: most obviously, because it involves land (the prize of dispossession). But water also plays an important role, as scholars and activists of the Pacific Islands rightly have emphasized. So, in what follows I address two ways in which the cultural politics of water in settler societies

5. http://www.unwater.org/fileadmin/user_upload/unwater_new/docs/Publications/water_scarcity.pdf

6. I was first alerted of this scholarship by Paul Backhouse, the Seminole Tribe's non-Indian Tribal Historic Preservation Officer and museum director.

operate. First, how water concerns settlement; second, how water is a domain for working out political relations of citizenship and sovereignty.

Settlement

Swampy wetlands like the Everglades have posed a problem for the project of U.S. settlement. Around the world people often view wetlands as potential land, but water stands in the way. Today, the Everglades are at one-half of their size by comparison to the late 1800s, when they covered approximately 4,000 square miles. An estimated half of the world's wetlands were drained during the same period.[7] Drainage produces land, albeit volatile land (volatile because drained lands are flood-prone and because they often change rapidly due to oxidation—subsidence in parts of the drained Everglades has reached 9 feet or more). The conversion of water into land is not uniquely the outcome of human genius. In the Everglades, for example, mangroves contribute to building land from water by spreading roots on which soil builds and thereby creating islets or shoreline: this is, as anthropologist Laura Ogden (2011: 88) calls it, a "mobile landscape." Lewis Henry Morgan (1868) wrote about the American beaver, which changes ecosystems by building dams and canals that create new wetlands and then meadows. Morgan studied beavers in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, not far from my childhood home in northern Wisconsin, where he was involved in building a railroad to haul iron from mines south of Lake Superior to distribution points.

* * *

Let me present a *conventional* brief history of Everglades drainage, then analyze it. Drainage began in the 1880s, and, with investments from the state and private capital, proceeded until the mid to late 1900s. Cracker families, as their descendants call them, eked out a living in commercial catfishing, farming, frogging, or decorative wading bird plumes and alligator hides. Seminoles participated in the same wetlands economies, even as they lost territory. Large-scale agriculture took hold. Water gave, but it also took: rains flooded fields and pastures, and deadly 1920s hurricanes killed thousands, mostly Black farm workers (anthropologist and novelist Zora Neale Hurston [1998] famously wrote about these hurricanes in *Their eyes were watching God*). Those disasters prompted construction of the looming Hoover Dike that encircles Lake Okeechobee and, after Hurricane Katrina, is under rehabilitation. Reclamation was realized with the massive Central & Southern Florida Project, a public drainage and flood control project authorized in 1948 that built over one thousand miles of canals and levees. Today, sheetflow has been diverted (an average of 1.7 billion gallons a day go to tide) (see Figure 2). Water is managed by a regional agency called the South Florida Water Management District.

7. On the global decline of wetlands, see http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/about_freshwater/intro/threats/. In the US, half have been drained since the 1600s. http://water.epa.gov/type/wetlands/vital_status.cfm. See also http://atlas.aaas.org/index.php?part=2&sec=eco&sub=wetlands.

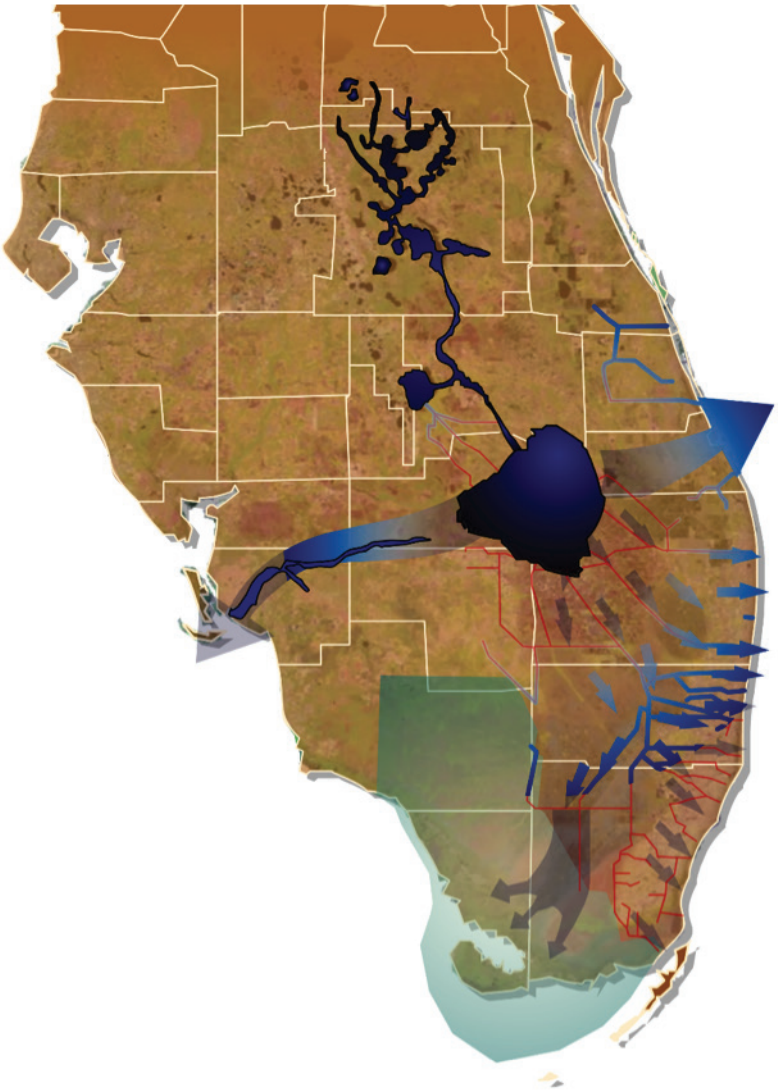

Figure 2. Current Everglades flow.[8]

I have just narrated an oft-told tale of settlement through land reclamation. Such stories begin with the land as unpeopled wilderness or, in the case of Clewiston, as a merely temporary camp for Seminoles, not settled until white people arrive.[9] And yet, in the middle of the city—next to the recycling bins—there is a mound, one of many in the region that indicate longtime indigenous presence. In a brochure, the

8. Downloaded 12/4/15 from http://141.232.10.32/images/flowmaps_hires/flowmap2-current_hires.png.

9. For example, the history section of the Wikipedia entry for Clewiston begins in typical fashion: "The area beside Lake Okeechobee was once used as a fishing camp by the Seminole Indians. The first permanent settlement began in 1920. . . ." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clewiston,_Florida.

region's large sugar companies describe the Everglades as originally a "harsh and forbidding wilderness that was not friendly to humans"; in the same sentence they mention native canoes along with migrating birds.[10] In nearby Ortona, indigenous peoples around 250 AD. built the largest precolonial canal system on the continent. The Seminole Tribe intervenes when Everglades restoration projects unearth human remains. It takes work to make the Everglades seem like a wilderness without people—cultural work, conceptual work, physical work—and to render it an uninhabited swamp.[11]

Reclamation—made possible in the Everglades by drainage—is about reclaiming land for productive use on a model of improvement. As the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's own agency history explains, at base, *re*clamation supposes a prior claim, a claim established by God's gift of the earth as the dominion of man (of course, we ask: which man?). Reclamation generally refers to bringing land from a state of "waste" to productivity. In Florida, "waste" often has been taken to include indigenous use and possession.

This is a much more general phenomenon in settler societies. Morgan's preface to *The American beaver* explains that when the Michigan railroad was proposed the "entire region was then an uninhabited wilderness," with the exception of a few hamlets in Marquette and some mining cabins. There is no contradiction, for Morgan, in describing the region as (were it not for iron) "unfit for human habitation" while just a few pages later acknowledging what he termed "curious and instructive" contributions to his knowledge by "Ojibwa trappers." The idea of wilderness is not simply a modernist opposition of nature and culture: wilderness ideologies are especially pervasive in settler colonial societies for a reason, a reason of property, indigenous dispossession and sovereignty.

Here it is worth noting that, in *Ancient society* ([1877] 1964), Morgan identified property in land as part of what propelled white Americans ahead of American Indians in stages of social evolution. Morgan held that "The history and experience of the American Indian tribes represents, more or less nearly, the history and experience of our own remote ancestors when in corresponding conditions." A tipping point in social evolution, he argued, was the development of private property: "It is impossible to overestimate the influence of property in the civilization of mankind"

10. Florida Crystals and U.S. Sugar Corporation (2001: 2).

11. In the Everglades *water* makes settlement more difficult to achieve in practice—drainage WAS grueling and expensive—but water makes settlement all the easier to justify, not only because the status of land is ambiguous but also because the changes between summer wet and winter dry seasons made people more migratory: even if Clewiston was a "temporary camp" for Seminoles, what conclusion should we draw? Today, many people in South Florida are not fixed in place, between the large migrant labor force that works in Florida's seasonal agriculture—with children coming in and out of the majority-Hispanic school system throughout the academic year—and the huge snowbird population of seasonal residents who fill the rural RV parks and coastal condominium complexes. Wetlands often thwart nation-building projects—swamps, after all, are known for their outlaws and resistance fighters, and the Everglades have seen much of both; on the other hand, they make easier the process of dispossession that accompanies reclamation because patterns of living make property claims more tenuous.

(ibid.: 426). He did not consider the Iroquois to have achieved civilization or "political organization" because he viewed those to be based in part on property relations he did not deem them to have. Enlightenment theories of property, such as John Locke's, further curtailed indigenous sovereignty because they linked the achievement of government to private property.[12] There is a settler colonial cultural politics to the theories of property that scholars—and homeowners, for the matter—inherit. To reclaim land for the nation requires both the physical and conceptual dispossession of indigenous peoples.

But it is too easy to pin the story of settlement and the cultural politics of water—which contributed to unfixed property—to the topic of reclamation, as if drainage were the problem. If that were the case, Everglades restoration presumably would reverse indigenous dispossession. Instead, to some extent ecosystem restoration here and elsewhere also has been a project of settlement. Restoration's organizational structure signals as much: the very same agencies that drained the Everglades, namely the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District, now lead the high-profile restoration project. But the links between reclamation and restoration run deeper, as a historical example illustrates. The massive C&SF project "compartmentalized" the region and, importantly, its civic obligations into distinct zones for agriculture, water conservation, residential use, and The Everglades National Park. As with the founding of other U.S. national parks documented by historians, Seminoles were evicted from the park upon its creation, cleared out to make wilderness but represented as part of it, and even proposed but never hired back as guides to give a native touch that northern tourists sought. Elected Seminole official Joe Frank refers to the creation of the ENP as the "last Indian Removal Act." State reclamation and restoration have gone hand-in-hand insofar as they participate in a shared settler colonial spacetime that treats humans and nature as incompatible and produces that incompatibility through historically and ethnographically observable processes. Wetlands restoration, then, also can be a mode of settlement.

Citizenship and sovereignty

If settlement is not simply an act of the past but is, rather, an ongoing structure of American society, one place to see this is at the intersection of water with citizenship, sovereignty, and practical governance.

The historian of Florida Michelle Navakas argues that into the 1800s the wet instability of Florida's "liquid landscape" prevented American models of agrarian citizenship from taking hold there. Examining late-eighteenth-century sources, she asks: "How does one possess, settle, and build on ground that percolates, erodes, and subtly but constantly changes?" (Navakas 2012: 90). Just as water and land are

12. John Locke considered American Indians in the United States to lack a property interest in the land and, therefore, to lack the makings of sovereignty. The political theorist James Tully (1980), a scholar of John Locke, demonstrated how Locke's theories underwrote indigenous dispossession.

ambiguous, so too, it follows, is citizenship. People configure political belonging in relation to water, and this takes particular form in settler societies.[13]

On the morning of June 24, 2008, Clewiston community leader Jeff Barwick was driving back from a family visit to North Florida when a *Palm Beach Post* reporter called him for comment on a development he never expected: the State of Florida announced a plan to buy the United States Sugar Corporation and all of its assets for $1.75 billion, with the goal of repurposing the newly-acquired 187,000 acres for ecosystem restoration.[14] Then-mayor Mali Chamness, the Cuban-American local bank vice president whose sport utility vehicle displayed a Florida agriculture license plate, learned of the deal from an email news alert. Shock reigned in town.

The bold purchase, cheered by environmentalists and covered nationally, would provide the "missing link" to reconnect Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades after the restoration of vast agricultural lands in between. The goal was sheetflow, or restoring an unbroken slow flow way between the Kissimmee and the Florida Bay. Unrealistic for many reasons, the emotionally charged vision of sheetflow served primarily as an aspiration. David Guest, a lawyer with Earthjustice Legal Defense, praised the buyout by referring to the flow way, telling *The New York Times*: "This is putting it back the way it was in 1890. . . . When you come back in 20 years, it will look indistinguishable from the way it looked before the white man" (Cave 2008). *Before the white man*. A few years later, I attended a speech to the Everglades Foundation by U.S. Senator Bill Nelson, who was sponsoring federal legislation banning the importation of Burmese pythons, which had caught the national imagination as invasive species in the Everglades. At the speech's climax, Nelson, his voice thick with longing, asked us to imagine Florida as it was almost five hundred years ago, when the "explorer" Ponce de León landed his ship: "and that's what we're all here today for." We, the listeners, joined him on that ship, admiring that which we and our Spanish hogs were about to invade. Settler coloniality shapes the dreams of both future and past, and of a future that restores the past. Earthjustice's dream of sheetflow, however, was most Clewiston residents' nightmare.

The city seal of Clewiston, which is known as "America's Sweetest Town," features an image of the United States Sugar Corporation mill that dominates the city

13. In the United States, property long has been tied to citizenship, whether in the ways that voting and taxation were structured or in the more philosophical tradition—following Jefferson, Locke, and other Enlightenment thinkers—whereby property is understood as the basis for stable and rational citizenship. Think here of the yeoman farmer, of voting rights tied to property ownership, of the cultivation of civic spirit through the cultivation of the land. Because until the late 1800s watery South Florida was considered undrainable, early surveyors and cartographers struggled even to represent South Florida on maps or in models of surveyors and engineers, and property was difficult to chart. Water can give or take private property, can curtail or expand citizenship, as it erodes or builds land. Riparian law—that is, of rivers—regulates property ownership in the United States, as the course of rivers produces new terra firma and turns other land into water.

14. The governor's press release was titled "Governor Crist Unveils Momentous Strategy to Save America's Everglades, Preserve National Treasure." http://my.sfwmd.gov/portal/page/portal/common/newsr/rog_gov_press_rel_2008_06_24.pdf. Accessed 2/6/14.

landscape. When the sour smell of fermenting sugarcane byproducts wafts through town, locals call it "the smell of money"; when ash from nearby cane fields burned for harvest falls on residential neighborhoods, some call it "Florida snow." In this diverse but de facto segregated small city, the company mediated Civil Rights-era race relations and influences the commercial and political landscape. For decades, many residents held that what was good for "Sugar" was good for the town. Citizens joined efforts to fend off environmental taxes and lawsuits aimed at curtailing nutrient pollution in the Everglades from agricultural runoff; in the 1990s, they cooked for fundraisers and fanned out across the state to place door hangers successfully urging Floridians to vote against a proposed sugar tax that would have funded Everglades restoration. As a guide for Sugarland tours and history buff described that time to me: "It was that old system of you worked for the company, and the company looked after you, and you looked after the community" (interview, 1/13/09). After the deal was announced, many Clewiston residents feared a future of economic decline and depopulation. Property values dipped, the mostly white and Cuban city leaders took sides, and U.S. Sugar pushed back at dissenters. At packed meetings and as friendships frayed, residents' identification with the interest position of "sugar" (and, more broadly, "agriculture") shifted.

Let me pause on how I'm thinking about interests. Most often, analysis of the Everglades and other major ecosystems presumes rather than queries competing "interests" and designated "stakeholders" such as indigenous peoples, developers, agriculturalists, and environmentalists. The sociologist Wendy Espeland (1998) studied a failed project to build a major dam in Arizona and showed that interests do not preexist people's engagement with an issue or project; rather, they are produced through politico-legal processes. Here's a brief example from Everglades restoration: an experienced water manager explained to me that a new stakeholder has emerged from negotiations over the Everglades: the environment, he said, now has a seat at the table. Indeed, the environment now has legal standing in Everglades policy. To treat people as interest-bearing stakeholders, as so much environmental policy does, denies the push and pull of practice and has a leveling effect. Seminoles, for example, generally do not consider themselves to be an interest group commensurate with agriculturalists, environmentalists, and developers, nor do they have that status in law. To commensurate such interests is itself a neocolonial act.

The nationally publicized "Reviving the River of Grass" buyout drove home the question of what restoration might really look like for the people and businesses of the Everglades. Interests realigned. It was a bitter pill for many that the company had handed environmentalists a victory, but within months, thanks in part to an environmentalist's $100,000 donation toward developing a regional economic development plan, some Clewiston-area residents sat down at the table. Civic leaders invited water managers and environmentalists to Clewiston for tours—a number of environmentalists I spoke with admitted that they had never been there—and hosted a South Florida Water Management District governing board meeting. Environmentalists, in turn, began to think anew of the human toll of wilderness-based restoration. Water managers took on new civic obligations: at one important 2009 meeting of the district's Governing Board, the chairman said: "For better or worse, we are now citizens of Clewiston . . ." (fieldnotes, 1/12/09). The annual Clewiston

Sugar Festival, which long had been underwritten by U.S. Sugar, added as its major sponsor the Seminole Tribe of Florida: 2012 festival t-shirts and programs featured the Seminole tribal seal. Such realignments track regional economic power shifts, especially in the context of Seminole casino gaming, but they also reconfigure possible futures.

Economic recession and a gubernatorial election scaled back the buy-out by 2010 to 26,800 acres and maintained U.S. Sugar's operations; life largely has settled back in to a familiar rhythm. Throughout this turbulence, defending a rural way of life and mode of agrarian citizenship tied to hard work and property ownership went some way toward claiming a place in the civic order, as we might expect. Nonetheless, the potential of restoration to sweep people off a rural landscape in order to restore sheetflow brings into focus the ways that even white Americans can be dispossessed by the settler logics of wilderness that also enabled reclamation (cf. Ogden 2011). Meanwhile, African-American and Latino laborers, whose work built and sustains this agricultural economy, generally are not in the room and have little ability to stake claims. Zora Neale Hurston organized her 1958 essay "Florida's migrant farm labor" around an aqueous image of mostly-Black laborers. For beneath the state's "greatest industry," agriculture, she wrote, "flows the plankton-rich stream of migrant labor" (Hurston [1958] 1991: 199). As one Latino worker told me of his work in oranges: "It would be good to emphasize in your book, that if these lands have flourished over time, it has been with the help of hard work by a humble people. People who have dedicated their lives to working" (interview, 6/10/12). The constitutive exclusion of (racialized and non-propertied) labor from the coproduction of nature and indigeneity produces ongoing inequalities in rural America.

Swamps pose a challenge not only for citizenship but also for sovereignty and governance around the world. The fate of the Everglades has been tied to sovereignty claims at least since the Seminole wars, and perhaps before. Everglades bard Marjory Stoneman Douglas mocked drainage schemes as having been characterized by what she termed a "schoolboy logic": "The drainage of the Everglades would be a Great Thing. Americans did Great Things. Therefore Americans would drain the Everglades" (Douglas [1947] 1997: 286). Restoration, too, is understood as a test of the U.S. nation, albeit now of environmental stewardship. Seminoles and Miccosukees locate their sovereignty in the Everglades and in struggles over and through water. This is a region where, as cultural geographer Jake Kosek wrote of New Mexico: "nature has been the primary target through which bodies and populations—both human and nonhuman—have been governed, and it has been the primary site through which institutions of governance have been formed and operated" (Kosek 2006: 25). You can feel it.

Recognizing that water's qualities and uses fit poorly with prevailing models of governance based on territorial political boundaries, policy makers and scholars in the last twenty years increasingly have turned to an approach called "watershed governance." This approach coordinates governance within the lands that drain into a common body of water and aims to naturalize governance in alignment with an ecosystems model. Florida adopted watershed governance earlier than many, in 1972 creating the modern South Florida Water Management District and four other districts across the state to oversee watershed-based management. Although

watershed governance is most commonly addressed in scholarship as an issue of scale, it also differs from other regulatory modes insofar as it governs water's particular qualities and force. That is, movement through space, not only scale, becomes the focus of governance.

International agencies recognize that sovereignty is challenged by environmental processes like water's movement: water does not stop at political boundaries. But water only seems like a special challenge to sovereignty: instead, it reveals a more general quality of sovereignty. Common definitions of sovereignty as supreme political authority, which are derived from early Enlightenment Europe, have operated in tandem with theories of property: both posited exclusive control, by contrast to an array of Medieval, non-Western, and minor theories of political and territorial authority. Following the ways that people manage water reveals that sovereignty in practice is not only or even primarily about absolute authority over territory but rather is about holding responsibility for governing political relations and interdependencies. An example is Seminole water management.

Indigenous sovereigns are challenged by water's movement, whether the issue is Ojibwe concern about contamination from a proposed iron mine near my childhood home in northern Wisconsin, Navajo claims against the federal Environmental Protection Agency for releasing contaminants from a mine cleanup into the Animas River, or, closer to here, Seneca commemoration of treaty violations fifty years after the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built the Kinzua Dam in the Allegheny River, thereby removing six hundred Seneca people and flooding ten thousand acres of Seneca land. On the Big Cypress Reservation, the relationship between water and sovereignty is almost palpable, both because Seminoles have fought as sovereigns for their water rights and because water is a focal point of the exercise of Seminole sovereignty in day-to-day governance.

B.C., as Big Cypress is often called, is the swampiest of the six reservations governed by the Seminole Tribe of Florida. At nearly eighty-two square miles, Big Cypress features large state-operated canals, a complex system of water infrastructure operated by the Seminole Tribe's Environmental Resource Management Department, acres upon acres of protected wetlands, ecotourism and airboat rides at the Billie Swamp Safari, agriculture reliant on irrigation ditches and pasture drainage, and various forms of day-to-day reckoning with water.

Big Cypress residents young and old readily speak of the Everglades as the refuge that famously saved their people from the American military onslaught during the nineteenth-century Seminole wars. In one conversation, Wovoka Tommie, who grew up at Big Cypress, pivoted from discussion of the swamp to saying that it's where Seminoles made their stand during the wars, it's the stuff of culture and tradition, and then he spoke of being unconquered, pointing to the tattoo on his neck that reads "Unconquered Pride" (interview, 6/12/12). Some credit their ancestors' knowledge of Everglades waterways and tree islands for their survival and, critically, their sovereignty as a nation. Nonetheless, and despite being recognized by the United States as a government, the Seminole Tribe of Florida had little say when the Everglades were drained and a canal sliced through the Big Cypress Reservation in the 1960s.

When David Motlow returned from two tours in Vietnam he had difficulty readjusting to life on the urban Hollywood Reservation, so he moved out to Big

Cypress. Some Seminole youth were in trouble, so he became a drug and alcohol abuse counselor and developed a "cultural heritage program" that offered culturally-specific treatment for abuse and addiction. Tribal elders offered guidance, but they lamented that the swamps were drying up from drainage, and that, as a result, it had become difficult to find and harvest medicinal plants that were needed to fight ailments. At the time, the Tribe was mired in land claim settlement negotiations. Motlow and others linked the two issues and decided that they needed to change the drainage systems that constrained Seminole life: "It became pretty clear to us that we needed to not only talk about getting our monies for the lands they had taken, but also [control of] the designs and systems that were pretty much implemented on us" (interviews, 5/24/01 and 6/2/01). At stake was the health of the Seminole people and polity moving forward.

In 1987, then, a historic water rights compact with Florida was reached that created the current tribal water management regime: the compact guaranteed water allocations to Big Cypress; affirmed the federal, not state, basis for Seminole water law; and established a Seminole Water Commission, Department of Water Management, and water code (Shore and Straus 1990). Seminoles now are major players in regional water management. Managing water as it enters and exits the reservation is much of the impetus for water sampling and other labor: that is, water management manages relationships with landowners to the north and south of the reservation. Big Cypress residents complain about becoming a "filtration basin" for polluting farmers to the north, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, about federal and Miccosukee landowners to the south who are concerned that Seminoles' major cattle operations not add phosphorus to water leaving the reservation. The compact is both a victory and a burden.

As tribal general counsel Jim Shore testified before the United States Senate in 2000 about Everglades Restoration: "Our traditional Seminole cultural, religious, and recreational activities, as well as commercial endeavors, are dependent on a healthy South Florida ecosystem. In fact, the Tribe's identity is so closely linked to the land that Tribal members believe that if the land dies, so will the Tribe" (Shore 2000). Nonetheless, Shore has acknowledged to me—and I have also found—that many Seminoles stand at a distance from the compact and related legal issues over water rights and regulation because, as Shore put it, "The general Seminole public doesn't feel as though they are part of the destruction of the environment" (interview, 12/6/00).[15] In 2002, Seminoles put up $25 million in revenues from casino gaming to join the Army Corps as partners in a reservation conservation project that has resulted in the construction of major filtration basins. Water management is costly and complex, these basins are underperforming to date, and some residents—especially among cattle owners and people waiting for homesite leases—view water management not as a sovereign act but rather as further imposition on their lives. Politics are intense at Big Cypress, and debates abound about whether environmental resource management policies should constrain Seminoles' cattle ranching, hunting, fishing, wood harvesting for chickee building, homesite leases, and other construction projects.

15. Generally, he explained years later, "we blame everybody upstream from us" (January 13, 2009).

Despite this political complexity, and despite Seminoles' sovereign entanglements, in dominant discourse in the United States and other settler societies there is a telling commonality in the ways that both indigeneity and nature are understood: both indigenous peoples and nature become historical only by becoming less themselves. That is, in this logic both the swamp and the Seminole can be *improved* (and thereby eliminated, whether drained or assimilated), they can vanish, or they can be pushed toward the fantasy of return to a prior state, but it is seemingly impossible to become *more* natural or *more* indigenous than ever before. Meanwhile, both nature and indigeneity are potentially redemptive for the settler state in their limited restoration. Here I am not myself drawing an analogy between nature and indigeneity, nor am I saying that indigenous peoples are necessarily more environmentally-inclined than others. Rather, I am pointing to one modality in the present whereby indigeneity and nature share characteristics of temporality and tense within the structures and logics of settler colonialism, and whereby these have life consequences for many people—not only Seminoles—who attempt to stake a claim to nature's future.

My larger book project examines other non-analogical connections between indigeneity and nature as well. These include the practice of hindcasting whereby restoration scientists model and measure an ecosystem's degradation from a past time of natural functioning. In Everglades science and policy, degradation is uncannily marked from the time of white settlement. Indigeneity is natural, whiteness historical. What's more, that nature is made knowable through violent dispossession: the major science study group that produced CERP defined the predrainage system by using the 1856 Ives map, a military map drawn during the Seminole wars. The points of connection between indigeneity and nature also include invasive species management, wherein government agencies including the state of Florida decide what is native with reference to colonization and the political boundaries of the nation-state, and wherein imperatives to love native species anchor settlers more deeply in the land as our own. Connections also show up in ecosystems services valuation, which is the ever-more-popular process of assigning monetary and other values to the beneficial outcomes for humans of ecosystem functions. Services include drinking water, food provision, flood control, and difficult-to-measure "cultural services." In the scientific literature, discussions of "cultural services" are especially likely to mention indigenous peoples,[16] whereas the many ways that ecosystems are cultural for non-Indians are less apparent.

Conclusion

My ethnography of what it is like to live as part of political communities in the middle of a massive wetlands restoration project is building toward an argument that nature and political belonging are coproduced in settler societies in patterned ways. But the point is not just to identify patterns: it is also to show how this configuration of nature and indigeneity has broad and problematic consequences for

16. See Simpson (2014: 20) on looking for culture instead of sovereignty among indigenous peoples.

both sociocultural and ecological flourishing. My challenge ahead, in part, is to think through what flourishing looks like.

The motto of Everglades restoration is "Getting the Water Right." "Getting the Water Right" in Everglades restoration policy refers to a specific goal: improving the quality, quantity, timing, and distribution of water in the ecosystem. Getting the Water Right is a mode of flourishing, but this is not only a technical task: it is also a social and cultural one, and it is a political one: getting the water right, after all, can refer not only to water's correctness but also to water rights, to a just distribution of water and all that it stands for. Tonight, my attention has been on the settler colonial dimensions of the cultural politics of water; in the larger book project, I am focusing on both the power and the failures of settler colonialism, on the political life of Seminoles and other indigenous peoples and, as anthropologist Audra Simpson (2014: 33, emphasis in original) theorizes it, on "the fundamentally interrupted *and* interruptive capacity of that life within settler society."

I am involved in a large National Science Foundation long-term ecological research network that studies the Florida Everglades, and in that context as well as at UCLA I relish the opportunity to collaborate with scientists who work on environmental challenges. The collaboration is easy if unsatisfying when social scientists' and humanities scholars' only roles are to translate scientific knowledge for a broader public or to study the impact of science on human communities. Things grow simultaneously harder and more satisfying when social scientists and humanities scholars enter the conversation at the theory-building stage, as part of shaping what kinds of questions can and should be asked in the first place. Unsettling nature in settler societies is hard work, whether in reclamation, restoration, or in our own efforts as scholars and citizens to understand and find order in the world without reinforcing injustices in the current order of things. Yet only by doing so can we "save" the Everglades in some yet-to-be understood way and do justice to the people—from cattle ranchers to sugar mill workers to environmental advocates—who live and work there.

References

Cave, Damien. 2008. "Florida buying big sugar tract for Everglades." *The New York Times*, June 25. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/25/us/25everglades.html?pagewanted=1&_r=0. Accessed December 4, 2015.

Douglas, Marjory Stoneman. 1997. *The Everglades: River of grass*. Sarasota, FL: Pineapple Press.

Espeland, Wendy Nelson. 1998. *The struggle for water: Politics, rationality, and identity in the American Southwest*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Florida Crystals and Sugar Corporation. 2001. *Florida sugar farmers: Proud partners in the Everglades restoration*. Available WWW: http://dpanther.fiu.edu/sobek/FI12010314/00001.

Hurston, Zora Neale. (1958) 1991. "Florida's migrant farm labor." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 12 (1): 199–203.

———. 1998. *Their eyes were watching God*. New York: Perennial Classics.

Kosek, Jake. 2006. *Understories: The political life of forests in northern New Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Morgan, Lewis Henry. 1868. *The American beaver and his works*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co.

———. 1964. *Ancient society*. The John Harvard Library. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Navakas, Michele Currie. 2012. "Liquid landscape: Possession and Floridian geography." *Early American Literature* 47 (1): 89–114.

Ogden, Laura. 2011. *Swamplife: People, gators, and mangroves entangled in the Everglades*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Shore, Jim, and Jerry C. Straus. 1990. "The Seminole Water Rights Compact and the Seminole Indian Land Claims Settlement Act of 1987." *Journal of Land Use and Environmental Law* 6 (1): 1–24.

Simpson, Audra. 2014. *Mohawk interruptus*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Tully, James. 1980. *A discourse on property: John Locke and his adversaries*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Wolfe, Patrick. 2006. "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (4): 387–409.

Jessica R. Cattelino is Associate Professor of Anthropology at UCLA. Her work centers on indigenous sovereignty, environment, economy, and American public culture. Her book, *High stakes: Florida Seminole gaming and sovereignty* (Duke University Press, 2008), examines the cultural, political, and economic stakes of tribal casinos for Florida Seminoles. Her current research explores the cultural value of water in the Florida Everglades, with focus on the Seminole Big Cypress Reservation and the nearby agricultural town of Clewiston.

Jessica R. Cattelino
Department of Anthropology
University of California, Los Angeles
341 Haines Hall
Box 951553
Los Angeles, CA 90095
USA
jesscatt@anthro.ucla.edu