

The United States, War, and the Environment in the Twentieth-Century Pacific World

Call for Papers
University of Kansas
October 15-16, 2021

Since the Spanish-American War, the United States has had a significant military presence in the Pacific World. The environmental consequences of the U.S. military presence in the Pacific, including the outbreak of disease in the Philippines, the dropping of nuclear bombs on two cities in Japan, the testing of even more powerful nuclear weapons in South Pacific islands during the Cold War, and the use of chemical defoliants in Vietnam, have been profound. Those consequences transcended the Pacific World: in the United States, East Asia, Australasia, and Europe, the use of nuclear weapons and chemical defoliants sparked concerns about the environment. By the time of the Vietnam War, emerging concerns about the global environment resonated with critiques of the war, encouraging some to perceive the war in Vietnam as more destructive to the environment than previous wars, and others to infuse environmentalism with the urgency of the global anti-war movement.

Intersections between the Pacific wars and the environment provide a tremendous opportunity to understand both twentieth-century environmental history and the significance of the long U.S. military presence in the Pacific World. Yet, there has not been a major academic conference on the environment and war in the twentieth-century Pacific World. Current scholarship provides a valuable starting point for new ways to address the environmental context and ramifications of the Pacific wars in a way that transcends any single conflict. We will build off these early studies to analyze the intersection between environmental history and the Pacific wars, with a hope to move beyond environmental consequences, in order to write a new transnational history that draws on environmental history, military history, and scholarship in war and society. By bringing together scholars of environmental history, military history, and the Pacific World we hope to create a lively conversation about the significance of the environment and the Pacific wars and help instill an environmental sensibility to a series of conflicts usually studied through a military framework.

A two-day international workshop at the University of Kansas will explore the intersection of the environment and war in the twentieth-century Pacific World. The workshop is scheduled for October 15-16, 2021. We hope to be able to meet in person in October, but if we need to move the workshop to Spring 2022 we will make that decision by September 1, 2021. We will also make it possible for some participants to join us remotely if they cannot attend in person.

The organizers of the conference invite applications to participate in the workshop. Rather than writing a full paper to circulate in advance, we ask that participants submit a 10-page “snapshot” of their presentations in advance; at the workshop, participants will discuss their work and invite comments and questions. Our goal is to pull out shared themes and questions through discussion in order to create a coherent group of papers, because we plan to work with a publisher to produce a book based on the workshop papers. Previous workshops at KU that adopted this method yielded edited volumes published by university presses—collections that press referees praised for their coherence and focus.

The workshop is sponsored by the University of Kansas's Center for Military, War, and Society Studies and Center for American History. The sponsors can support economy travel to Lawrence and lodging during the workshop; meals at the workshop will be provided. Project coordinators Beth Bailey, Andrew Isenberg, and Paul Landsberg will help direct the workshop.

To apply for participation in the workshop, please send a cover letter, a 3-page cv, and a 2-page synopsis of your paper to paul.landsberg@ku.edu. The application deadline is June 1, 2021.

Please feel free to contact us at blbailey@ku.edu or at isenberg@ku.edu if you have any questions. We look forward to hearing from you.