

Online Research @ Cardiff

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository: <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/115943/>

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

Herrmann, Rachel 2019. Watery work. International Labor and Working-Class History 95 file

Publishers page:

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies. See <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html> for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.



Watery Work
Rachel B. Herrmann
Cardiff University

- Andrew Lipman. *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015.
- Simon P. Newman. *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- Christopher L. Pastore. *Between Land and Sea: The Atlantic Coast and the Transformation of New England*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Daniel O. Sayers. *A Desolate Place for a Defiant People: The Archaeology of Maroons, Indigenous Americans, and Enslaved Laborers in the Great Dismal Swamp*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014.
- Nancy Shoemaker. *Native American Whalers and the World: Indigenous Encounters and the Contingency of Race*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

Between 2013 and 2015 a spate of new scholarship emerged on coasts, swamps, and oceans, predominantly focused on the seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century regions bordering the Atlantic Ocean—North America, the Caribbean, the British Isles, and Africa—and in some cases, beyond it. The monographs sampled here are representative of this historiographical turn. What is remarkable is the extent to which each book deals with labor, even when work is not the author's stated focus. These writers have emphasized various themes about work, from the erasure of non-white laborers' work from the historical record, to variations in race relations, to the connections between work and environmental changes or work and environmental stasis.

Although there are several generative trends that have contributed to this historiographical shift, three among them—race relations, climate change, and a dustup between historians of the Atlantic World and Native American studies scholars—seem particularly important. Of course, scholars have been studying the history of race formation in the Americas for some time.¹ With the election of President Obama, however, more scholars have probably

¹ Earlier work on race explored white attitudes toward people of African descent, then tested assumptions that race relations were fraught from the earliest decades of colonization, then asked questions about the role of gender and

become interested in comparative studies of race, especially because earlier work focused on race in one region. The facts of climate change and the advent of the Anthropocene have raised questions about how race relations affect the extent to which rising coastal waters place communities at risk.² These growing interests have in turn pushed activists and scholars to consider the role of water and its absence in forging connections and contributing to outbreaks of violence—as in the case of Standing Rock Sioux “water protectors” and their campaign against the Dakota Access Pipeline.³

Finally, the spate of Atlantic World histories in the 1990s and early 2000s prompted critiques from historians of Native America, who worried that Atlantic History was merely imperial history with a new name, and that the subfield gave historians too much license to continue to ignore the role of Indians—many of whom wielded more power in the interior of the continent, and away from the coasts on which Natives and non-Natives came into contact with

religion in race formation, and then began querying how notions of Native Americans fit into nascent ideas about race in North and South America. For the earlier and current work on race formation with which Newman is engaging see Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1975); Stephen Innes and T. H. Breen, *“Myne Owne Ground”: Race and Freedom on Virginia’s Eastern Shore, 1640-1676* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005 [1980]); Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Nancy Shoemaker, “How Indians Got to be Red,” *American Historical Review*, 102, no. 3 (1997): 625-44; *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country*, ed. Tiya Miles and Sharon P. Holland (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); Nancy Shoemaker, *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Rebecca Earle, “The Pleasures of Taxonomy: Casta Paintings, Classification, and Colonialism,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 73, no. 3 (July 2016): 427-66.

² Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, “Defining the Anthropocene,” *Nature* 519, no. 7542 (12 March 2015): 171-80; Rachel Herrmann, “A is for ‘Anthropocene,’” *The Junto: A Group Blog on Early American History*, April 27, 2015, <https://earlyamericanists.com/2015/04/27/10990/> [accessed October 1, 2018]; Joyce E. Chaplin, “The Other Revolution,” *Early American Studies*, 13, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 285-308, esp. 307.

³ On the Dakota Access Pipeline see Jon Eagle Sr., “Turbulent Water: The Dakota Access Pipeline and Traditional Cultural Landscapes,” *Forum Journal*, 31, no. 3 (Spring 2017): 61-8. On water and Native American history more generally see Erika Bsumek, “Imagining Indians and Revisiting Reclamation Debates,” *RCC Perspectives*, no. 1, *Eco-Images: Historical Views and Political Strategies* (2013): 27-42.

each other.⁴ Those critiques have invited pushback from historians intent on interpreting coasts as spaces of continued Native sovereignty. Together, these books offer new ways of thinking about labor in the regions touched by water.

Simon Newman's *A New World of Labor* appeared first, and explicitly compares coastal labor to island labor. His circum-Atlantic study of the British Isles, the Gold Coast of Africa, and Barbados from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century argues that labor differed across time and space. Newman finds that attitudes toward and treatment of bound white laborers in Barbados helped to develop ideas about plantation slavery, to delimit categories of labor, and eventually, to create notions of racial difference in Jamaica, the Carolinas, and further afield. In England people measured wealth by landholdings, on the Gold Coast by property in enslaved Africans, and in Barbados by a combination of land and property in enslaved laborers. Work shaped ideas about race rather than the other way around. Newman's work does not explicitly address water as a theme, but some of the most contested spaces of labor relations centered on coasts and the challenges of travelling between ship and shore.

Christopher Pastore's focus is Rhode Island and its environment. *Between Land and Sea*, which was published in 2014, insists that Narragansett Bay was a space that refused categorization, existed in a space of balance and betweenness, and was undergirded by tension between improvement and stasis. From 1636 to 1849 the bay transformed from an unknowable estuary into a boundary, then a borderland. Eventually, it became a space that had to be physically improved and intellectually imagined.

⁴ For this historiographical turn see Amy Turner Bushnell, "Indigenous America and the Limits of the Atlantic World, 1493-1825," in *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 191-222; Juliana Barr, "The Red Continent and the Cant of the Coastline," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 69, no. 3 (2012): 521-26, esp. 522.

Also in 2014 and moving inland, Daniel Sayers's archaeological study, the Great Dismal Swamp Landscape Study (GDSLS), explores how diasporic communities inhabited and worked in the Great Dismal Swamp in North Carolina and Virginia from 1607 to 1860 (though the book covers a period that begins in 1585). In *A Desolate Place for a Defiant People*, Sayers theorizes that inhabitants left material records and an archaeological signature that "reflects their autexousian praxis," their critique of the Capitalist Enslavement Mode of Production world and "the exploitative labor, sexual, and social conditions it fostered" (116). The Great Dismal Swamp, which offered refugees spaces of dry land in which to build communities, discouraged pursuit by slave masters because of its reputation as an unnavigable, watery morass full of disease.

Two final books appeared in 2015. In *The Saltwater Frontier*, Andrew Lipman demonstrates that the seventeenth and eighteenth-century coast of New England and New York, far from being a European space, was one inhabited by Native watermen who actively reacted to and contested the arrival of Dutch and English colonists as these worlds knitted together. Nancy Shoemaker also makes an argument about race, joining Newman's interest in refining scholars' arguments about it in different places. *Native American Whalers and the World*, her extensive study of the Native New England whalers documented in ship logbooks and journals, concludes that race was contingent on many factors, and varied dramatically from the eastern seaboard of the United States to Fiji.⁵ She is interested in ships, beaches, islands, and

⁵ Shoemaker and Lipman join other scholars such as Daniel Vickers, John Strong, and David Silverman who have written respectively about Nantucket, Long Island, and Martha's Vineyard, and Jace Weaver, who has written about the Red Atlantic broadly speaking. Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); John A. Strong, *The Unkechaug Indians of Eastern Long Island: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011); David J. Silverman, *Faith and Boundaries: Colonists, Christianity, and Community among the Wampanoag Indians of Martha's Vineyard, 1600-1871* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jace Weaver, *The Red Atlantic: American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World, 1000-1927* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

reservations. In a nineteenth-century world where people assumed that Native Americans were uncivilized, unchanging, or extinct, Indians contradicted these ideas “by traveling the world, mastering ocean navigation, and accumulating knowledge of the globe’s great diversity in language, custom, and environment” (6).

This is an interdisciplinary coterie of scholars who have a strong command of sources and methods. Most of the authors draw deeply upon manuscripts and rare books on multiple continents, while Sayers’s team chose several dry swamp locations in which to dig and locate objects, rather than excavating a full archaeological site. Shoemaker’s research was extensive enough to build a database of Native whalers (which appears in the book’s appendix), as well as a primary-source reader on this subject.⁶ Newman and Pastore make lovely use of maps to show how Europeans theorized space on the Gold and Rhode Island coasts, respectively, and Lipman’s maps convincingly demonstrate the extent to which Natives and non-Natives shared the region he describes.

In the coastal regions that Lipman and Pastore cover, sailing, fishing, and provisioning work is most readily apparent. Indians produced light birch bark canoes, pine and tulip tree dugouts (the largest of which took weeks to carve), and ash and maple paddles. Native watercraft had longer waterlines than European ships and could hold more people. Pastore and Lipman demonstrate that before and after the English and Dutch arrived in New York and New England, Native women and children did the shell fishing, dug and dove for shellfish, transported fish, and preserved them with smoke. This work was intertwined with trade and diplomacy; after people consumed the shellfish, men fashioned seashells into wampum, and women strung these beads into strings and larger belts. Wampum was a sacred object that Indians used for condolence

⁶ Nancy Shoemaker, ed. *Living with Whales: Documents and Oral Histories of Native New England Whaling History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014).

ceremonies, and exchanged in diplomatic meetings, marriages, and trade agreements. Europeans replicated these practices even if they did not entirely understand them.

Lipman and Shoemaker agree that many colonial writers misunderstood, failed to see, and even erased Native labor from their accounts of North America and the wider world. Colonists depicted seventeenth-century Indians as landbound laborers despite depending on Native canoemen to transport letters, people, and foodstuffs such as fish and grain. English writers' tendency to ignore Native canoemen made it easier to claim that the English owned the ocean (the Dutch, by contrast, believed that ocean space could be shared). Lipman corrects these early English claims. He argues that whereas in the early seventeenth century the coast was a shared Native and non-Native space, after King Philip's War (1675-6; usually 1675-1678 in Maine and Acadia) the Indians whom the English did not enslave became more dependent on the sea to live and work—though the coast “remained a fluid, contested space” (204).

Colonists' unwillingness to acknowledge Indian water work also made it easier for them to minimize their seizures of indigenous land. Shoemaker points out that nineteenth-century whaling literature “made invisible the labor of colonized people in imperial expansion” (79). White American sailors tended to call all non-white people “Indians” no matter where in the world they sailed, and so an irreconcilable tension arose from the fact that Indians worked on ships and encountered other “Indians” (or indigenous peoples) on faraway shores. If it was easy to discount Native ship work, it more difficult to undervalue it in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries because whale byproducts became so desirable. The daily wage of \$1.50 was comparable to the wage for daily farm labor, but the work also posed more dangers: Native whalers worked longer hours, farther from home and family, and at greater risk of impoverishment and death. The number of whaling voyages doubled from the 1810s to 1820s

and doubled again in the 1830s. During the 1840s and 1850s there were over 2,000 departures. Native whalers' labor was held in high esteem especially because fewer white men wanted to work in the industry.

English officials in Africa found it more challenging to underestimate the work of African coastal laborers because Africans maintained control of power relations and because the variety of laboring conditions made generalizing about them less feasible. Most of the first enslaved people forced across the Atlantic came from Angola and Kongo, followed by Senegambia, Benin, and, after 1650, the Bight of Benin (or Slave Coast), and throughout the eighteenth century the majority hailed from the Gold Coast and the Bight of Biafra. Initially, the Gold Coast was a poor periphery; the interior was where the action happened. As the slave trade expanded, a powerful new class of caboceers, or European middlemen, cohered in these waterside settlements to facilitate trade. Caboceers were soon joined by other new workers: middlemen, translators, and foremen, as well as local fishermen, whose canoe labor "ferried goods and people between ship and shore" because the Gold Coast was too rocky to form natural harbors (171). Variations in laboring conditions yielded degrees of unfreedom. Castle slaves were responsible for caring for and feeding incarcerated slaves destined for the Americas, as well as for cleaning their dungeons and escorting them to and from the beach to exercise; they likely wielded considerable power over them, too.⁷ The work of canoemen became especially indispensable, but Europeans frequently complained about laborers who did not listen to, or obey, them. Castle slaves on the Gold Coast who worked as canoemen earned high enough wages to provide themselves with tobacco, brandy, rum, cloth, and weapons and ammunition. Enslaved women in West Africa enjoyed a fair degree of flexibility in work choices. Female

⁷ For an excellent book on relationships on the middle passage itself, see Sowande' Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea: Terror, Sex, and Sickness in the Middle Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

castle slaves did not cook or clean like their white or black counterparts (indentured and enslaved, respectively) in Barbados; they carried raw materials like clay, shells, and stone, and enjoyed more freedom and autonomy than female slaves on American plantations.

The work done on coasts was often connected theoretically to the work performed on islands, where working conditions shifted at varied rates. Newman's work reminds readers that England was an island surrounded by water. He shows that late fourteenth-century England suffered from a surplus of land and a shortage of labor after the Black Death, when the population dropped from 3.5 to 2.1 million people and remained low until the early 1700s. It was in Barbados that working conditions changed more rapidly than they did in England or Africa. On this other English island—which was rare in its lack of indigenous people at the time of European arrival—planters preferred Scottish, then English, and then Irish servants because these were the supposed categories of decreasingly reliable workers. Indentured women had worked alongside white men during the 1620s, the early years of the colony's founding, but were quickly moved from plantations to houses where they became nurses and cooks, and produced and mended clothing. There were almost as many white indentured servants as enslaved Africans on Barbados by 1646. Once enslaved women took over nursing, cooking, and cloth production, work opportunities for free white women decreased, and these women stopped choosing to move to the colony. By the last quarter of the seventeenth century, wealthier colonists had cleared land, consolidated it, and set to work on the profitable task of sugar production, at which point the composition of Barbadian workers changed.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, as soils grew exhausted and sugar prices declined, Barbadian planters implemented a process that historians have called "amelioration": they employed fewer white servants, enslaved more people of African descent, grew more food

for them, and allowed enslaved people to produce, eat, and market their own provisions, which made it the only sugar colony to grow by natural population increase. The institutionalization of slavery again changed working conditions on Barbados. The enslaved people who replaced white servants experienced more restrictions than white servants and their enslaved counterparts on the Gold Coast, reemphasizing Newman's point that unfree labor varied a great deal across time and space. To be clear: Newman does not argue that this system was benevolent, but his point is that systems of slavery varied widely across the British Atlantic. Slaves were deprived of their humanity, and Newman's book does not shy away from chronicling their mistreatment: readers will wince at the case of a seven-year-old castle slave in Africa who was struck by a musket ball in his knee, and who died after an amputation failed to save his life, or the story of the three enslaved laborers on Barbados who died after digging up and consuming the bodies of deceased animals. The Barbados Assembly in 1702 had to pass an act specifying how much bread, meat, fish, and clothing masters had to provide each week, presumably because they were failing to do so without independent regulation.

If in Newman's book the African coast offered workers the most autonomy, in Sayers's book it is swamps that fostered similar degrees of freedom. Sayers, drawing heavily on Marx's theory of alienation (in which workers in capitalist systems lose agency), is most invested in studying how the environment of the swamp changed conditions of work. He suggests that diasporic Great Swamp inhabitants created a "Praxis Mode of Production" that allowed people to undermine "inequalities and oppressions inherent to capitalistic modes of production and social worlds by forging and perpetuating a novel social world outside the capitalistic world" (10). People who lived outside of the Great Dismal Swamp defined it "as a nonproductive, cursed element of the landscape: capital had not yet compelled the transformation of the swamp, the

swamp yielded little profit to anyone, and its particular natural character had little appeal to most people living outside of its boundaries” (40).

Diasporic swamp dwellers, in turn, were alienated from their connections with non-swamp inhabitants, and experienced an almost vicious cycle that compelled them to flee to and remain in the Great Dismal Swamp. In the sixteenth century, before Europeans sailed to North America, Native Americans lived in the swamp. Sayers notes the arrival of Spanish colonists, and concludes that by the time Jamestown colonists arrived in 1607, Powhatan (Wahunsenacawh) had expanded the southern part of his empire to such an extent that he had “decimated or compelled the flight of the poorly understood Chesapeake tribe” into the swamp (85). The 2,000 square mile space was also home to Nansemond, and possibly Recehecran, Meherrin, and Tuscarora tribes, who settled it between 1607 and 1730.⁸ Maroon communities likely formed there after 1619, when enslaved Africans first arrived in Jamestown, and then after 1680, when “marronage was a most significant aspect of African American lifeways and resistance” (81). In the nineteenth century, these established maroon communities worked for

⁸ The Native American history in Sayers’s book is less successful than other aspects of the monograph. Sayers’s focus on the Capitalist Enslavement Mode of Production means there is less room to consider Native gift and commodity exchange economies (or indeed, Indian slaveholding), which cohered before the rise of capitalism and likely contributed to notions of labor and production that differed from non-Native and enslaved ideas. And although he acknowledges the Spanish, the book takes a fairly Anglocentric approach to the history of a region that has traditionally been interpreted as a more Atlantic space; it seems likely that maroon communities formed sooner than Sayers acknowledges, because Spanish colonists also enslaved Africans in North America and invaded earlier than the English. On gift exchange see Seth Mallios, *The Deadly Politics of Giving: Exchange and Violence at Ajacan, Roanoke, and Jamestown* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006); Joseph M. Hall, Jr., *Zamumo’s Gifts: Indian-European Exchange in the Colonial Southeast* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Jessica Yirush Stern, *The Lives in Objects: Native Americans, British Colonists, and Cultures of Labor and Exchange in the Southeast* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017). For Indian slavery see Allan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). Histories of the Spanish southeast include Eric Griffin, “The Specter of Spain in John Smith’s Colonial Writing,” in *Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of the North Atlantic World*, ed. Robert Appelbaum and John Wood Sweet (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 111–34; Eliga H. Gould, “Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery,” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (June 2007): 764–86; William S. Goldman, “Spain and the Founding of Jamestown,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (July 2011): 427–50; Alejandra Dubcovsky, *Informed Power: Communication in the Early American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

canal companies to produce shingles and lumber. Enslaved people experienced more arduous labor, digging canals to make the swamp more controllable; they faced exhausting labor, mosquitos, yellow fever, and a fierce punishment regime. The conditions of labor in the swamp, in other words, depended on whether a person was Native, free, or enslaved.

The unpredictability of working conditions is also a theme that appears in work on oceans. A comparison of Lipman's and Shoemaker's work suggests that Indians enjoyed less room to maneuver in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century realms of non-Native labor than they did in the nineteenth. New England colonists kidnapped at least fifty Native men from 1600 to 1620, forcing them to labor on ships, to serve as translators, and to provide information about their people. Labor practices varied from Manhattan to Boston, and Indians sometimes volunteered to help neighbors in return for gifts or wages, sometimes colonial masters fined, sued, and whipped indentured Indian servants, sometimes they held Native children as laboring hostages, and sometimes colonists threatened Native debtors with enslavement. Coercive hiring practices had largely waned by the 1820s, but as late as 1828 the Massachusetts legislature was still granting non-Native guardians the authority to bind out for the length of a voyage any Indians accused of habitual drunkenness, vagrancy, or idleness—guardians do not seem to have taken advantage of this law, but its continued existence is likely indicative of ongoing tensions. Although eighteenth-century Native whalers like the Unkechaugs issued formal complaints about being cheated of their pay, they also enjoyed contracts that granted them unsupervised autonomy for much of the long whaling season. Here Lipman and Shoemaker are revising work by Marcus Rediker, which in 1987 posited a dichotomous relationship between sailor and captain.⁹ Shoemaker contrasts conditions for Indians with conditions for black sailors; black

⁹ Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5.

whalemen did not expect white crew members to treat them equally, but Native whalemen found that rank was often more important than race in obtaining promotion. In contrast to countries like New Zealand, the United States had more racial categories and was more inclined to categorize by race, so Native whalemen who enjoyed promotion, advancement, and the ability to take advantage of the wider world's "inherent flexibility of racial expectations" came home to a more stratified world (195). Native whalemen nevertheless advanced through the ranks, and did not seem overly troubled by tense relationships with captains.

Hindsight makes it seem as if coasts and oceans were subject to inevitable environmental changes. In the main, however, it was people who changed the natural world. Several of these writers describe a pattern in which colonists' technology met indigenous labor to create a global market that pressured Indians to overhunt an animal and deplete its population. Previous continental scholarship has shown that on land, European markets for beaver skin hats and deerskins drove overhunting of beaver, deer, and otter.¹⁰ Christopher Pastore's work reminds us that beavers were also aquatic animals. Between 1624 and 1626, the initial years of Dutch settlement, the Dutch shipped 16,553 beavers across the ocean. As demand rose, Indians began to overhunt beaver. Maritime historians of the Pacific coast on the opposite site of the continent tell a parallel story with a longer chronology and a similar result. Joshua Reid argues that Makah Indians' whaling practices allowed them to retain control of their territory and sovereignty far longer than some other indigenous peoples—into the mid-nineteenth century—but also that

¹⁰ For beaver see Maia Conrad, "Disorderly Drinking: Reconsidering Seventeenth-Century Iroquois Alcohol Abuse," *American Indian Quarterly*, 23, no. 3/4 (Summer-Autumn 1999): 1-11, esp. 8. For beaver and other animal populations see Gilles Havard, *The Great Peace of Montreal of 1701: French-Native Diplomacy in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 50, 146. For exaggerations of poverty see José Antônio Brandão, "*Your fyre shall burn no more*": *Iroquois Policy toward New France and Its Native Allies to 1701* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 69, 85-88, 120. For fur prices see Gail D. MacLeitch, *Imperial Entanglements: Iroquois Change and Persistence on the Frontiers of Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 195. See also Sheppard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999).

Native labor established precedents for commercial logging, provisioning, and whaling.¹¹ Lissa Wadewitz describes the depletion of salmon fisheries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹² W. Jefferey Bolster and Brian Payne make similar points about fisheries.¹³ This trend is discernible further away from the coast, too. Lipman discusses the right whale, which was overhunted by the 1730s. Nancy Shoemaker talks about the shift to hunting and then overhunting sperm whales in the nineteenth century. The hunt for whales pushed Native seafarers further away from the coast—and in Shoemaker’s history, across the globe as whalers expanded their search for markets. In these histories, overhunting follows a model that resembles the depletion of game animals on the North American continent—but whereas the market for fur skins pushed Native hunters into the interior and across North America, marine animals pushed Native and non-Native fishermen out across the globe.

The changes in work that depleted animal populations wrought escalating changes on the physical landscape. Pastore shows that as Indians killed beavers, their dams were destroyed, and the land along the coast became much drier. Colonists moved into these newly arid regions, and brought their domesticated animals with them because early modern theories about agriculture trumpeted the value of animal manure. Estuaries filled with human and animal dung, and coastlines physically changed. Pastore’s Narragansett Bay is a place caught between “two dominant epistemologies concerning the natural world,” the one that “considered the ocean (and to some extent water in general) unchanging, eternal, and somehow exempt from human influence,” and the second that “believed that terrestrial land could be—and often must be—

¹¹ Joshua L. Reid, *The Sea is My Country: The Maritime World of the Makahs, an Indigenous Borderlands People* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 3-4, 175.

¹² Lissa K. Wadewitz, *The Nature of Borders: Salmon, Boundaries, and Bandits on the Salish Sea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 55, 168.

¹³ Brian J. Payne, *Fishing a Borderless Sea: Environmental Territorialism in the North Atlantic, 1818-1910* (East Lansing, MI, 2010); W. Jefferey Bolster, *The Mortal Sea: Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

‘improved’” (3). Rhode Islanders reconciled these tensions by imagining one part of the bay as freshwater and improvable. The water’s ability to obscure who owned what parts of the coast fostered boundary disputes about land and labor, and made it more difficult to improve the coast *or* take responsibility for “improvements” gone wrong. People changed the land and water by catching fish, digging clams, sending animals to graze in meadows, drawing maps, building forts and beacons, and fighting wars. Their efforts made the coast less resilient.

Although coasts and oceans in these works are theorized as spaces of environmental change, swamps appear either as spaces beyond the control of humans, or as relatively static spaces. Sayers describes the relationship between the Great Dismal Swamp and the Nansmond Scarp, a 100,000-year-old geological formation that once formed the coast of “an ancient sea—a forebear of today’s Atlantic Ocean” (15). Between 10,000 and 15,000 years ago, the Scarp and its parallel north-south-running counterpart, the Fentress Rise, created a flat-bottomed basin that became the Great Dismal Swamp. Environmental changes were perhaps less evident in the Great Dismal Swamp. Sayers does not suggest that maroon communities tried to drain the swamp, because their safety often trumped comfort. But he does show that they tended to live in its elevated, dryer areas, as evidenced by the material objects his team unearthed. Their decision was not unusual. Sayers concludes that most Europeans admitted that they “could not tame, transform, or control the swamp”; they tried to avoid it (82). Changes in swamp dwelling were characterized more by migration than by work, at least until the nineteenth century, when canal companies did finally begin trying to alter this saturated landscape.

These books demonstrate that coasts, islands, oceans, and swamps were transformed by different types of labor from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. Scholarship on coasts and islands seems to have paid more attention to gendered variations in labor. It may be more

challenging to write about gender in swamps because objects were reworked and reused enough times to make it more difficult to identify their original purposes and users. It is apparent that although some of these regions shared similar geographic features, people inhabited them differently. The coast that Newman describes was a periphery for many decades, but Lipman's coastal region was a heartland before written memory. It was obviously easier for colonists to ignore some types of work more than others. Europeans could erase Native labor because Indians lost in wars against English colonists. African canoemen could not be ignored because of the degree to which Europeans depended on them. In all places, watery work was dangerous. People who worked at sea faced drowning, poverty, and the possibility of uncompromising and manipulative captains. White indentured servants on islands and the African coast were subject to diseases and long contracts. Swamp dwellers were isolated – even when they chose to be – and unfree swamp laborers were exposed to infection and disease. Enslaved people who worked on islands had to deal with harsh masters, starvation, punishment, family separation, injuries, and death. It thus becomes clear that histories of labor on coasts, oceans, and swamps draw deeply upon histories of the environment, histories of race, concepts of space, and theories of Marxist alienation. It seems that the possibilities for theorizing watery work are boundless, indeed.