



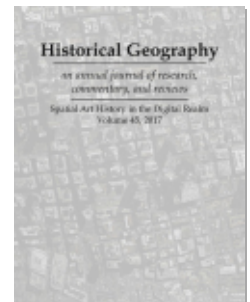
PROJECT MUSE®

*Unfreezing the Arctic: Science, Colonialism, and the
Transformation of Inuit Lands* by Andrew Stuhl (review)

Arn Keeling

Historical Geography, Volume 45, 2017, pp. 281-283 (Review)

Published by University of Nebraska Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/716055>

Hispanic and Latino New Orleans is important to a wide variety of researchers dealing with various academic studies involving Hispanic or Latino communities, particularly those communities in urban areas in the wider US South. This study of intertwined ethnic identities, histories, and places will have broad readership in the years to come: the book won AAG's John Brinkerhoff Jackson Prize in 2015, and deservedly so.

This text takes its place within the field of historical scholarship about New Orleans as the first of its kind: a study of the influences and impacts that various Hispanic or Latino groups have had upon South Louisiana over the past 250 years. While unique in its study, this work is well-situated within existing bodies of scholarship, including histories of New Orleans such as Ned Sublette's 2009 volume, *The World That Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books). Studies of other Gulf Coast cities include Thomas Kreneck's *Del Pueblo: A History of Houston's Hispanic Community* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), and works focused on Hispanics and Latinos in the broader South include Angela Stuesse's *Scratching Out a Living: Latinos, Race, and Work in the Deep South* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016) or Julie Weise's *Corazón de Dixie: Mexicanos in the U.S. South since 1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

A typical historical geography work would necessarily have a particular area of interest, and the wider New Orleans region is the obvious focus of *Hispanic and Latino New Orleans*. A potential critique might suggest for more comparative arguments between the historical geography of Hispanics in New Orleans and similar situations in other Gulf urban areas such as Houston or Tampa, although too much emphasis on such contrasts might risk diluting the New Orleans focus. Similarly, a bit more on the cultural landscapes of the home country situations of post-Katrina Hispanic immigrants might be of interest. But these are minor comments. *Hispanic and Latino New Orleans* successfully tells the story of a diverse set of peoples instrumental in the making of modern New Orleans; or, as the authors note in Chapter 1, "...books such as this one explicate how real people living in actual communities participate in the creation of specific places over the long term" (p. 9).

The authors open the book with a striking phrase, noting that "New Orleans... has long hidden much of its Hispanic and Latino sides in plain sight" (p. 2). Because of the impressive scholarship seen in Andrew Sluyter, Case Watkins, James Chaney, and Annie Gibson's *Hispanic and Latino New Orleans*, a better spatial history of these oft-forgotten communities now exists. Professional academics and students alike will find use from this excellent addition to the field of historical geography.

Patrick D. Hagge
Arkansas Tech University



Unfreezing the Arctic: Science, Colonialism, and the Transformation of Inuit Lands. ANDREW STUHL. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. Pp. vii+232, maps, photographs, index. \$35.00 cloth. ISBN: 978-0-226-41664-9.

In this era of concern over the politicization of science and its embattled role in public policy, Andrew Stuhl's *Unfreezing the Arctic* offers a timely historical reflection on the important social role of science and scientists. It is far from an uncritical intervention, however; rather, in his exploration of a century of scientific exploration and investigation of the Western Arctic, Stuhl raises deep questions about the entanglements of scientific knowledge and practice with

the settler colonial reterritorialization of Inuit lands. In offering a “transnational environmental history of science,” Stuhl’s account represents a novel contribution to histories of Arctic science that will also be of interest to the growing number of scholars exploring historical geographies of science.

Departing from traditional scholarly narratives of Arctic exploration situated within national or imperial contexts, Stuhl grounds his study in the Inuit territories of the Inupiat (in Alaska) and Inuvialuit (in Canada’s Northwest Territories) in the transformative period between the 1880s and 1980s. The study traces how Inuit lives and territories were transformed during this period by successive waves of economic, military, and political interventions, each bearing on its crest a raft of scientific and technical experts seeking to characterize, understand, and (to some extent) control the Arctic environment. These successive characterizations are summarized in the titles of the five substantive chapters: dangerous; threatened; wild; strategic; and disturbed. Throughout this history, we encounter a wide range of scientific initiatives and actors, from Hudson’s Bay Company explorers to the Canadian Arctic Expedition (1913-18), from tundra scientists studying reindeer herding to permafrost scientists with the U.S. Naval Arctic Research Laboratory.

Arranging chapters along these diverse historical themes and episodes allows Stuhl to explore the continuities and changes in the scientific encounter with the Arctic environment (and, to some extent, with Inuit themselves). This strategy comes somewhat at the expense of narrative coherence within some chapters, as Stuhl moves back and forth across topics and national borders—a peril, I suppose, of the novel transnational frame the author adopted. Nevertheless, in focusing intently on the field activities of Arctic scientists, the book ably illustrates how scientific knowledge was both shaped by and in turn facilitated the projects of outsiders in the region, whether economic, strategic, or political.

Yet these interventions were not unidirectional, and in the excellent fifth chapter Stuhl deftly explores how the emergence of environmental concerns with industrial development in the “fragile” Arctic intersected with rising Inuit sovereignty and political claims in the 1970s. This chapter provides important new insights into the simultaneous indigenous mobilization and contestation of Western scientific knowledge and southern scientists in their struggles against—and in some cases, for—industrial development. The emergence of environmental assessment requirements for major resource developments such as pipelines provided a platform for Inuit to advance claims for recognition and to assert sovereignty over their traditional territories—often in close collaboration with sympathetic scientists.

In emphasising the colonial context of Arctic science, *Unfreezing the Arctic* resonates with the well-established literature linking science, environment and colonialism associated with historians and geographers of science, including Roy McLeod, David Livingstone, Richard Grove and others. While not entirely neglecting these perspectives, Stuhl roots his study more directly in environmental and Arctic histories which have similarly highlighted the influence of scientific actors in the region’s (inter)national histories. While rightly connecting the modern field sciences with ongoing colonial processes that unfolded throughout the period in question, somewhat confusingly the term “postcolonial” (p. 11) is deployed to describe the entire period and region in question. Although wishing to avoid the term “decolonial” to describe more recent Inuit engagements with science in the era of land claims, the designation postcolonial fails to capture the ways in which settler colonialism provided (and continues to provide) “the structures through which land was used, studied, and managed.” A more explicit engagement with the recent literature in settler colonial studies might have clarified these terms.

Indeed, Stuhl's epilogue invites readers to consider the endurance of these colonial relations in the contexts of contemporary climate science, in particular. He rightly criticizes recent scientific and political representations of climate peril that have "re-established the north as empty of people and history, clearing space for another round of intervention" (p. 149). Only in "unfreezing" such ahistorical and colonial representations of the Arctic, and by heeding the experiences, knowledge and aspirations of Arctic residents themselves, Stuhl suggests, can southern scientists (and historians!) contribute to a more ethical and socially just response to the many environmental and social challenges of the region.

Arn Keeling
Memorial University of Newfoundland



Salvage: Cultural Resistance Among the Jorai of Northeast Cambodia. KRISNA UK. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016. Pp. xxxiv+230. 8 b&w illustrations, 1 map. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN 978-1-5017-0303-4. \$89.95 cloth. ISBN 978-1-5017-0302-7.

Imagine that you live in a country where "more than a million tons of bombs were dropped" (p. 52). Try visualizing that figure. Next, think about what effect that bombing would have on your country's population and culture. Krisna Uk spent nearly a year doing ethnographic fieldwork among the Jorai of Northeastern Cambodia, studying one subsistence farming village's response to such a bombing campaign by the United States, followed by the vicious rule of the Khmer Rouge from 1975-79. Few such studies of rural villages so affected by explosive remnants of war (ERWs) exist. Uk's work is therefore an important intellectual contribution, describing the consequences of prolonged trauma from war through her focus on one traditional Southeast Asian culture, in Leu, Cambodia.

Uk first considers traditional Jorai culture. Individuals are primarily shaped through their relationship with nature. The Jorai in Leu do not like, and have an oppositional relationship with, the forest—they constantly clear it near their village. As it contains wild animals and spirits, it is considered dangerous. Villagers also need the forest—plants there, for example, are thought to have magical properties. During bombing campaigns (and during Pol Pot's regime), the Jorai were forced to use the forest for protection, to hide. Food could not be cooked for fear of drawing attention from the planes overhead. The bombing and attacks by the Khmer Rouge, therefore, strongly altered traditional Jorai practices.

Spiritual views were also reevaluated and modified based on the bombing campaigns. Gods were considered powerful, requiring sacrifices. Villagers thought the first U.S. planes were powerful gods. Some villagers lost all faith after the war.

Uk further presents Cambodia's history of colonialism and independence from France in 1954, including Prince Sihanouk's attempt to assimilate minorities under the majority ethnic population, the Khmer. (In this and other sections of the book, Uk provides several handy and helpful tables, such as one giving a chronology of key events, and others discussing, for example, historical regions, individual survivor testimony, and bombing data.) Prince Sihanouk saw other minorities in Cambodia as underdeveloped, in need of Khmer culture, education, and progress (p. 28). Here Uk reveals the intersection of local village and cultural history with both state and global politics. She finds her subjects' traditional cultural beliefs and behaviors now inextricably interconnected with late modern state building and geopolitical forces. Through direct quotes from villagers her ethnography shows, rather than tells, how villagers then forge a contemporary sense of identity.