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Inspired by William Cronon’s pathbreaking *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991), environmental historians have long studied the reciprocal relationships between cities and their hinterlands. The engaging collection of research in *Nature’s Crossroads: The Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota*, edited by environmental historians George Vrtis (Carleton College) and Christopher W. Wells (Macalester College), invites a renewed dialogue among urban environmental historians over methodological framings of space, place, and scale. Examining the intertwined histories of Minnesota’s two largest cities, Minneapolis and St. Paul, which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century fourteen miles apart on opposite shores of the Mississippi River, *Nature’s Crossroads* offers significant insights on the ways in which environmental change is deeply connected to broader histories of settler colonialism, capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, culture, politics, gender, race, and labor.

Building upon urban environmental historiographical developments in analyzing urbanization, suburbanization, and exurbanization, *Nature’s Crossroads* distills an intriguing question for the field: How did the particular dynamics of geography, technology, culture, and regulatory regimes shape the evolution of two distinct cities that eventually came to constitute a single metropolitan region marked by a cohesive sense of cultural, political, and economic affairs—and even more fundamentally, a shared sense of place? Parsing the unified metropolitan status of the Twin Cities and their common strategic location in the upper Midwest to consider the peculiarities of each city’s development and relations with its hinterlands, the anthology offers a sophisticated model for how urban environmental historians might approach situating a city within a broader regional analysis spanning a range of communities (local, Indigenous, state, regional, national, global) and ecosystems (forests, farms, aquatic systems, and extractive industrial landscapes).

Authored by a multidisciplinary group of scholars and public agency officials, the volume’s seventeen chapters cohere around a set of focal
points: the reciprocal reshaping of the Twin Cities and their hinterlands; and the ways in which this ongoing process's circulation of natural resources (water, timber, wheat, and iron ore figure prominently), people, capital, and ideas drove the physical environment's transformation and influenced people's cultural attitudes toward the environment.

The book is divided into three thematic sections, each roughly following a chronological order. The first part, “The Dynamics of Environmental Change: Cities, Commodities, Hinterlands,” opens with the cosmologies and cultural practices of the Dakota and Ojibwe (also known as Anishinaabe) peoples, the incursion of Euro-American settler forces through the fur trade, and the dispossession of the Dakota and Ojibwe through land cession treaties and violence centered at Fort Snelling, built by American troops in 1825. St. Paul, designated the capital of the Minnesota Territory in 1849, became a bustling commercial center at the head of navigation on the Mississippi, where steamboats linked the region to expanding national markets. By the end of the nineteenth century, St. Paul became defined less by its waterfront and more by its status as a railroad hub. Wells and Vrtis contrast the “commercial” Saint Paul with the “industrial” Minneapolis, which was founded in 1856 and overtook Saint Paul in size and influence by 1880. Fueled by hydropower from Saint Anthony Falls, sawmills were the most significant employers in Minneapolis in the mid-nineteenth century, but by the 1870s, the flour milling industry became increasingly dominant at the falls as an extensive rail network connected Minneapolis with an expansive hinterland of wheat fields to the west. The first chapter’s sketching of the Cities’ early development provides a foundation for the first part’s ensuing chapters, which cover the Cities’ embeddedness in varying geographic scales, including the rise of wheat agriculture in Minnesota’s Red River Valley and Minneapolis’s flour milling within the global economy; the shared hinterland land use relationship between Saint Paul and the neighboring state capital of Madison, Wisconsin; the engineering of the Upper Mississippi watershed in the 1880s, which benefited millers and industrialists while simultaneously devastating Anishinaabe communities by inundating their traditional homelands; the “working environments” of logging and farming communities in northern Minnesota that required significant capital investments to overcome environmental challenges; and by the early twentieth century the gradual transformation of the North Woods into a space of leisure frequented by residents of the greater Twin Cities, often to the dismay of local residents who had been invested in local extractive economies.

The second part, “The Twin Cities and the Built Environment,” shifts attention from the Cities’ broader hinterland regions to the urban core and the vital array of city services that public officials and residents developed to manage and improve the urban environment—though, as the chapters demonstrate and Kathleen Brosnan highlights in the afterword, this notion of human control over nature was always illusory. This section’s authors study a wide range of urban infrastructure and how it influenced the Cities’ social life, including the increasingly sophisticated metropolitan water supply system’s influence on conceptualizations of public health; the evolution of Minneapolis’s first urban park (founded in 1883) according to local officials’ shifting notions of nature’s role in promoting social order; transportation systems’ significant effects on urban development, from the late nineteenth century’s streetcar lines and proliferation of cycling culture to the subsequently sharp rise of automobile-centered planning after World War II, and yet another pendulum swing in the late twentieth century away from low-density suburban sprawl and toward high-density, mixed-use neighborhoods; and finally, the important role of landowners’ decision-making in organizing land use, which could vari-
ably complement or contradict regulatory regimes of environmental management at any given time.

The third part, “Environmental Politics, Thought, and Justice,” explores historical debates over the valuation and use of environmental goods, as well as deliberations regarding which community members’ voices should be prioritized when it comes to environmental injustice disputes. This final section’s authors consider fractured community lines over political and economic issues deeply tied to the environment, including mid-twentieth-century divisions between the Ojibwe people and Twin Cities conservationists and historians over land use and public memory as Euro-American settlers successfully fought to preserve an eighteenth-century British fur trade fort located on the Ojibwe’s Grand Portage Indian Reservation in Northeast Minnesota; deepening rifts between Iron Range residents in the northeast and distant politicians in Saint Paul over lawmakers’ increasing embrace of environmental protections at the expense of the iron-ore miners’ economic security; pioneering environmental policy and urban planning such as the short-lived Minnesota Experimental City Authority (an imagined eco-city) and the state legislature’s 1982 enactment of the Minnesota Acid Deposition Control Act, which set in place sulfur emissions regulations eight years before national legislation on acid rain mitigation. In the third section’s final two chapters, the authors move beyond the traditional lens of American environmentalism (think conservation of resources and preservation of wildlands) to interrogate the uneven effects of environmental harm and how social justice advocates addressed environmental questions in Minnesota in the 1960s, over a decade before the rise of the national environmental justice movement. The authors feature Indigenous histories of survivance and environmental justice, including the origins of the American Indian Movement (AIM) within a Minneapolis community of Native Americans led by Ojibwe men who demanded tribal sovereignty and land restoration on the one hand and pro-

tested poor housing, healthcare, police brutality, and discrimination on the other; and the mid-1970s political controversy over where to store radioactive waste from the Prairie Island Nuclear Generating Station, which was located to the south of the Prairie Island Indian Community, a federally recognized reservation of the Bde-wakantunwan (Mdewakanton) Band of Eastern Dakota.

*Nature’s Crossroads* is the latest book in the University of Pittsburgh Press’s History of the Urban Environment series, which continues to constructively foreground urban centers as critical spaces for forging new theoretical and practical understandings of coupled human-natural systems’ environmental histories. The book will be of particular interest for environmental and urban historians, historians of the Midwest, and geographers, as well urban planning and public policy scholars and practitioners. Although the editors isolate the final two chapters as the volume’s main contributions to environmental historians’ increasing focus on questions of race and environmental inequality (and indeed, those chapters’ authors are the most explicit in framing their studies with respect to environmental justice scholarship), it is worth reading the entirety of the anthology with an eye toward understanding how these interconnected Twin Cities histories are part of the ongoing conversation about how nature (both material and theoretical) mediated relations of power among different groups of people over time. Taken as a whole, the volume’s chapters underscore both Minnesota’s central role in Midwestern environmental history and the ways in which environmental historians’ narrative and analytical skill sets can help reorient and deepen our understanding of place, from the local to the regional.
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