continue the story into the late twentieth century feel a bit rushed. Despite these issues, it remains a valuable contribution to the environmental and agricultural history of the arid landscapes and ranching economies of western North America.

Etienne S. Benson

University of Pennsylvania


The history of Cape Cod is a story “not of relentless declension, but of change” (7). In the first self-described environmental history of Cape Cod, John T. Cumbler argues that in every era, Cape Codders have both protected and exploited its resources. Cumbler divides Cape Cod’s history into “three distinct regimes of resource utilization” (5–6).

In the first regime, native peoples farmed corn, beans, and squash; caught fish and shucked oysters; and gathered sea and upland plants. While these practices shaped the Cape, they stopped short of extensive degradation. The second regime, of European settlement and local resource production, is a much-mythologized period of Cape Cod history. Countless local historians and travel writers have recounted Pilgrim settlement, early farming, fishing, saltworks, whaling, and shipbuilding. Cumbler adds something new by arguing that this extractive era did not result purely in a wasteland, as Thoreau wrote in the mid-eighteenth century. Rather, prominent Cape Codders pushed this trope in their conscious shift to a tourism-based economy.

Cumbler’s third section, “Dependence on Distant Resources and Revenue from Recreation,” details better than any existing history how the twentieth-century recreational economy shaped Cape Cod’s environment. Increased tourism and homebuilding caused water pollution from septic systems and runoff, solid waste disposal problems, wetland degradation, and erosion issues.

While Cumbler situates his work in New England environmental history (he includes the obligatory reference to William Cronon’s _Changes in the Land_), his primary contribution is to the rich historiography of Cape Cod. Because previous historians of the Cape focused heavily on the environment, _Cape Cod_ reads less like a revolutionary interpretation and more like an update to the histories of Henry C. Kittredge, Josef Berger, and James C. O’Connell. That is not
to disparage Cumbler’s contribution: many of the previous histories of Cape Cod are outdated. Cumbler also adds a much-needed look at how a recreation economy has created unequal access to the Cape and a retiree-dominated populous that pushes out families and one-time “locals.”

Cumbler draws mostly from secondary literature, with the exception of many twentieth-century planning documents. Lacking primary source material, Cape Cod sometimes reads as another romantic take on the Cape’s old white clammers. His short shrifting of natives does little to belie that notion; Cumbler spends just seven pages on pre-European inhabitants of Cape Cod and four of those are through the lens of Samuel de Champlain’s travelogues. Cape Cod also might have benefitted from a deeper analysis of how the Cape’s fast-moving geological processes influenced the region’s ecology and human settlement patterns.

Despite these small quibbles, Cumbler’s Cape Cod is the most comprehensive and nuanced book on the peninsula in over fifty years. While Cape Cod contains no surprising new history, it is a wonderful place-based synthesis that the layperson or student of environmental history would certainly enjoy. Additionally, Cumbler’s policy recommendations could prove useful to planners in any tourism-based economy. Cumbler assembles Cape Cod scholarship gracefully in a book full of interesting anecdotes and beautiful prose. Beach reading, anyone?

Jackie Gonzales

University at Albany–State University of New York


It is commonplace today to open a newspaper or magazine and find journalists lamenting how divorced Americans are from their food sources, how children believe that food originates in supermarkets rather than on farms, and how social inequalities are increasingly mirrored in food inequalities. These seem like very modern problems tied mostly to recent developments in industrial agriculture, but Cindy R. Lobel’s Urban Appetites finds similar patterns in nineteenth-century New York City. Even journalists of the mid-nineteenth century similarly expressed nostalgia for bygone days when New Yorkers had face-to-face contact with their food providers.