

Book Review



Leap, Braden T. 2019.

Gone Goose: The Remaking of an American Town in the Age of Climate Change. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. 270 pp. \$34.95 (paper), ISBN: 978-1-4399-1734-3.

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What does it mean to be a rural man in the twenty-first century? In the popular imagination, rural manhood represents simplicity: stoic, connected to nature and natural work, austere, conservative. But contemporary forces, including profound environmental change, have destabilized the foundations of rural manhood. These forces have driven rural communities to renegotiate masculinity as well as other human (and nonhuman) relations and inequalities. Although representations of idyllic rural manhood have probably always been more simulacra than substance, recent disruptions have seriously complicated rural lives today.

Braden T. Leap engages such issues in his timely and sincere book *Gone Goose: The Remaking of an American Town in the Age of Climate Change*. Leap uses a case study of a Missouri town he calls Sumner (population 102) to explicate how climate change provoked “entangled adaptations” filtered through intersecting inequalities (p. 6). In addition to masculinity, Leap’s analysis illuminates rural femininity, posthumanism, racial and class inequalities, and community building, among other topics. Notably, Leap’s account is one of the first to document how rural communities respond to specific effects of climate change from an intersectional ethnographic framework.

The book traces the story of Sumner, formerly proclaimed “Wild Goose Capital of the World” because of the thousands of Canadian geese who migrated there. However, in recent years, warmer northern winters and other human-caused environmental changes kept the geese away. A town that once “revolved around geese and goose hunting” (p. 4) now needed to look elsewhere to bolster its economy and pride. In a sense, the town succeeds by reinventing itself as a destination for duck hunting, but the process reveals much about the meanings of gender, class, race, and how humans manipulate nonhuman animals and ecosystems. Leap conducted an excellent long-term study of Sumner, living for close to two years in the community,

working as a volunteer in the local national wildlife refuge where the geese once roosted and frequenting the local bar.

The first three chapters draw upon Leap's data from the bar, which catered to "sportsmen." This section best captures masculinity as it intersects with rurality, race, and class. As Leap states in chapter 1, "A white man in Sumner was not expected to behave only as a white man. He was expected to act as a white, *rural* man" (p. 51). For example, men in this rural community defined themselves through their ability to control nature, achieved through physically demanding work and leisure activities such as hunting. Yet, as documented throughout the book, the decline of goose hunting as sport and economy challenged this local pillar of masculinity. Chapters 4–6 of the book center on Leap's observations while working at the local national wildlife refuge. These chapters examine conflicts between rationalizing forces of the government bureaucracy that controlled the refuge and community interests in reinventing the refuge as a community space despite the decline of geese. Leap argues that underlying this friction were "moral conflicts informed by socially constructed assumptions about how people ought to relate to environments and nonhumans therein" (p. 126). Locals tended to espouse a "utilitarian" view that the natural environment and nonhuman animals are important primarily in their use to people. Men, in particular, vocalized resistance to government-led conservation efforts, blaming "overly-educated, urban-based bureaucrats" for sabotaging the goose habitat in the first place (p. 125).

The book really shines where Leap showcases his nuanced understandings of rural life in this community (e.g., his depiction of a discussion men in the bar have about duck calls that opens chapter 2). Other major strengths are the clearly close relationships he has developed with community residents and the complexity of the analysis. Leap builds a multilayered story, weaving gender, race, class, and place together in an intricate web. This approach reveals many keen insights (e.g., the account of rural masculinity and class dynamics of hunting different forms of prey is fascinating [pp. 61–66]).

While the analysis is illuminating, I thought concepts of rural masculinity/femininity could sometimes sound like intrinsic causes of behavior rather than socially constituted outcomes (e.g., references to "drawing on his rural masculinity" [p. 117] or they "drew on their rural femininities" [p. 84]). This is largely an issue of language, but I think scholars could take more care to avoid casting masculinity (and femininity) as both cause and effect. Finally, while this is a terrific intersectional account of several overlapping inequalities, I thought age and aging could have been considered more since most respondents appeared to be middle aged or older. This is not so much a critique as an issue that might warrant further investigation in future research of rural inequalities.

Minor critiques aside, *Gone Goose* is a model study of how climate change affects communities. This book should stimulate more work examining the dialectical relationship between humans and natural phenomena. Humans have fundamentally altered the environment, but resulting environmental instabilities have

fundamentally altered humans. These issues are of particular interest to scholars of masculinity, as definitions of manhood often rely on the ability to dominate the “wildness” of nature. Scholars and teachers of masculinity, rurality, environmental sociology, and intersectionality will find a wellspring of ideas in Leap’s enlightening volume.