

Urbanization and Environment
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Module - 04
Urban environmental social sciences frameworks
Lecture - 21
Urban Environmental History: The US. Part II:
More Thematic Variations and Global Influences

So, with this we will now cover the second part of this lecture Urban Environmental History. So, we still continue with the North American context, but in this lecture we enter into More Thematic Variations and also we you know complicate the varieties of urban environmentalism that actually kind of facilitated urban environmental history in the United States.

And also you know urban environmental historians or rather environmental historians borrowing frameworks and methodologies from the scholarship that developed in America, along with you know including additional insights which came out from their own particular geographies. So, we would complicate you know this urban environmentalism a bit by discussing the global influence of urban environmental history from North America.

And then we would also talk about how today you know it would be a kind of a fallacy to just try to understand urban environmental dynamics through the deployment of in single or in that sense linear perspectives or linear varieties that have been discussed by environmental historians. Rather it would be more scientific if the theories or theoretical paradigms are actually to a great extent informed by you know empirical traction.

So, we will enter into the debate, but before that we would be focusing more on the other thematic variations in environmental, urban environmental history in the United States. Apart from you know the scholarship on urban technical infrastructures and also sustainable flows or you know literature which map commodity flows between city and its hinterland.

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CONCEPTS COVERED/ ROUTE MAP

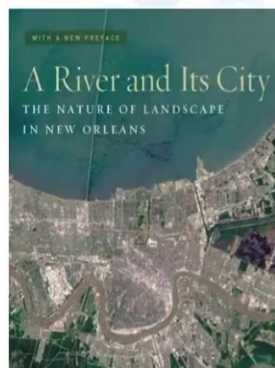
- new themes in North American UEH
 - disasters
 - inequality
 - sprawl
- global influences

So, we will be covering new themes in urban environmental history in North America including natural disasters or hazards inequity or inequality and urban sprawl. And definitely you can understand you know that these 3 components disasters or the 3 snippets like disasters, inequality and sprawl they are also intricately interlinked with each other. We will discuss global influence of the scholarship and then we will discuss and talk about you know the common or similar themes you know in urban environmental history across the globe.

And whether there is potential or whether it is the opportune moment to come up with a comparative tactic to learn lessons from and for quote unquote multiple elsewhere or not.

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Disasters



So, disaster being a major theme in urban environmental history since the last few years and I think when Katrina you know kind of there was this outbreak of Cyclone Katrina. I think a Hurricane Katrina it disrupted the idea that only cities of the global South are vulnerable you know to environmental crisis or natural hazards for that matter. So, this book if you remember we discussed this book in the previous lecture, lecture 21 when we are actually discussing urban environmental history scholarship mainly you know the mainstream domain.

But I am again mentioning Kelman's book here, because this book was initially published in the first publication was in 2003. But after this outbreak of Hurricane Katrina this book was again published with additions or additional chapters on you know Hurricane Katrina and a new preface. So, where I think Kelman you know talked about the significance of this particular lens to understand natural disasters and natural hazards shaping contemporary you know American cities.

Similarly, you know this particular book by Ted Steinberg called Acts of God and you if you know whether it is properly or clearly visible or not if you see the blue portion here in this book. So, it is written that includes a new chapter on Katrina and its aftermath. So, this book on natural so this book if you see the subtitle its quite interesting the subtitle is the unnatural history of natural disaster in America.

So, I think I talked about also like political ecology or urban social sciences frameworks, actually enable us to understand what is not a natural what is natural plus what is not natural you know in the environment, in nature. So, how you know social political cultural all these variables also shape environment and in turn get shaped by it. So, this is one of the significant I think aspect which we learn by probing deep into social sciences frameworks and paradigms.

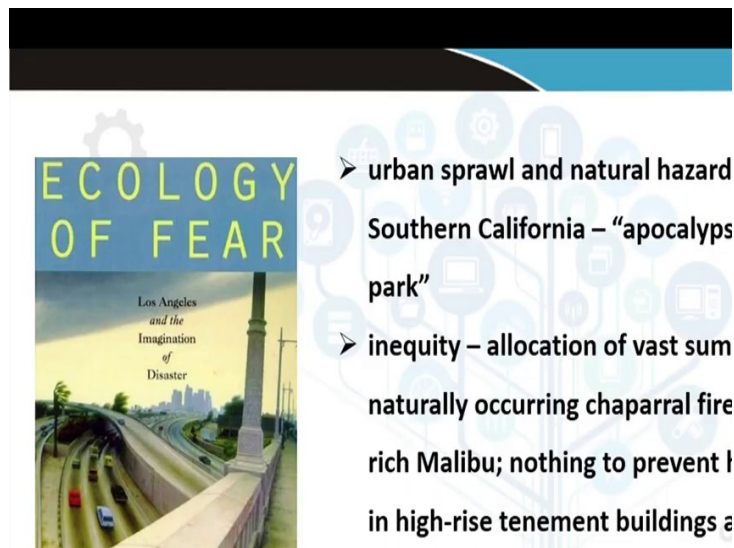
So, I think this book and the subtitle say unnatural history of natural disasters in America I think it is very very significant and in this particular book Steinberg, he of course he sheds whole lot of light on hurricane prone Florida and he you know kind of perceives call it as quote unquote Deathscape. And in this book if you go through this book you will see that how he also you know kind of brings out I mean brings out whole lot of data on natural hazards encountered by American cities.

And he says that this the federal government keeps on kind of concealing the concealing the amount the quantity and quality I mean the implication of disasters on citizens and American cities and in both quantitative and qualitative terms. So, for example, he talks about the very less discussed and explored natural disasters and hazards like for example, the earthquake, the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 the severe earthquake of Charleston, South Carolina in 1886.

And he also shows and says that how you know federal government subsidizes coastal urban development and it is not I mean the that urban risks that its absolutely a risky venture that you know these kind of coastal urban development actually it is very risky for that particular scape. These idea is not depicted and projected in official records at all.

So, I think Acts of God this particular book by Ted Steinberg it is fascinating and it is eye opening. And I mean I think these two works personally I consider to be seminal so far as the history of disasters or urban disasters so far as American cities are actually concerned.

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So, another veritable poster child of disasters is actually the city of Los Angeles, Los Angeles and like any discussion on Los Angeles as a disasterscape or as an apocalypse theme park will be incomplete if we do not discuss this book by Mike Davis. So, this

book the title of the book is Ecology of Fear Los Angeles and the imagination of disaster where Mike Davis unpacks layer upon layer of disasters both real and imagined.

And he shows that why and how you know urban sprawl plus natural hazards, natural disasters, hazards in South California makes it kind of a playground you know for I mean playground for disasters and a kind of what he calls apocalypse theme park. There are sections there is a chapter in his book on Malibu the case of letting Malibu burn and there Mike Davis shows you know how unequal this allocation of resources remain and how this is absolutely deliberate from the part of the statecraft.

So, he says and he should demonstrate allocation of vast sums to how the federal government expended vast sums of money or funds to combat naturally occurring chaparral fires in uber-rich Malibu. And on the other hand it almost did not do anything to prevent horrific fires in high rise tenement buildings and low rent hotel housing poor immigrants. So, you know this element of in equal inequality it comes out sharp very prominently in his discussion.

And another very radical and bold comment or rather a provocative question that Mike Davis raises in this book is that in American films documentaries you know in less formal literature this burning of Los Angeles is actually cheered or the destruction of Los Angeles is actually cheered and, why is it cheered? So, Mike Davis provides a very bold a very radical answer to this provocative question which he raises himself and he says that you know this destruction of Los Angeles is cheered, because the city to a great extent it actually represents the other.

Non white, non citizen and non heterosexual and hence its destruction is cheered in some of the darkest recesses of the national psyche.

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This is a lesser flamboyant, but I would say not so less you know insightful book and this is by Jared Orsi again on Los Angeles. And see the title it is Hazardous Metropolis flooding and urban ecology in Los Angeles. So, here Orsi traces the long history of disastrous floods in Los Angeles he takes us back you know to the history I mean during the late 18 century.

So, when in 1781 but urban development was promoted on the bank of this little river Los Angeles, he talks about how you know the locals they actually warned I mean I mean there were warnings there were apprehensions from the part of the locals that you know it was not a wise exercise or not a wise venture which was being undertaken.

But you know nobody listened to that and unfortunately further development and redevelopment efforts went on during the 19th and 20th century and of course the results were floods and increase in frequency of floods and increase in intensity of floods. So, what was happening is that you know even like best engineering plans, schemes, designs, mechanisms and flood control measures proof to be a fallacy could not tackle floods, frequent floods and its implications in the city of Los Angeles.

So, you know you if you see this green box. So, I again take this from this particular book itself hazardous metropolis that despite the city's 114 debris dams, 5 flood control basins you can imagine and nearly 500 miles of paved river channels Southern Californians have discovered that technologically engineered solutions to flooding are just as disasters prone as natural ways.

And all of course we know about you know techno chauvinism that the planners they were not really the engineers more importantly they were you know of course, aligned with bureaucratic plans bureaucracy and techno. So, there is of course an alignment and nexus between bureaucracy or among bureaucracy technocracy and engineering. So, you know together this collective the group, they wanted to when they saw that you know they were not being able to control floods in Los Angeles.

And you know the flood control measures seemed to be quite weak in front of the torrential currents of the Los Angeles river itself. So, then they became more desperate because always there is an element of techno chauvinism, that you can you will be able to identify in this you know state induce, it state induce flood control measures or strategies. So, what the state did? It kind of it converted the Los Angeles river and its main tributaries into concrete drainage system.

So, what happens now is that the city otherwise is desperate you know to get water, but you know due to this particular intervention what happens now is that if there is a heavy downpour. So, immediately within an hour rain water just crashes out into the Pacific Ocean and nowhere you know there is any chance of retainment of the rain water. So, this is the fallacy of this, modern so called modern hydraulic technological interventions in the making of Los Angeles.

So, this particular book it talks about the fallacy of property making initiative with Los Angeles violating warning from local Indians and the error which has occurred through the turning of the entire river and its major tributaries into concrete drainage system

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So, apart from disasters and you know inequality again as an outcome of this kind of natural disasters breaking the city and impacting lives and livelihoods of citizens. So, this is definitely now a very important theme in North American urban environmental history. But apart from you know natural disasters and inequality there is another genre, there is another domain you know that has also become very prominent that has caught a whole lot of limelight. So, far as urban environmental history in North America is concerned.

And this is kind of scholarship which I mean sheds light on race and you know this literature to a great extent is actually written from the justice perspective. So, environmental justice framework also you can one can spot you know in this particular genre and also this literature has sort of a UPE that is urban political ecology bent. Because it discusses it talks about you know power hierarchies, it talks about unequal allocation of natural resources, it talks about the inadequacies you know of this urban system or utility.

So, where I mean the people that especially people coming from disadvantaged groups, people coming from you know from race and from urban minor the minority groups. So, how they suffer from the lack of access to even basic utilities and how you know this is like this is a major problem this is a burning issue in the swelling, squatting population that American cities, now kind of project or display.

So, for example, this book by Kenneth Jackson called Crabgrass Frontier, you know it talks about the material implications of urban sprawl in North America. So for example, I will give a quick you know kind of overview to this literature. Because like if you see the what happened in post 2nd world war America we see that there was urban sprawl, there has been urban sprawl.

So, there has been this rise of the mass suburbia. So, what happened is that there was exponential growth, exponential urban development through the conversion of ecological infrastructures for sure. And also you know it also established the American or it could facilitate and promote American Reliance on automobiles and petroleum to the largest extent possible and definitely it also segregated the nation cities in terms of race. So, all these the snippets, all these components need to be understood, needs to be understood together you know as a composite whole.

So, historians and scholars they also started looking into you know these various components, these multi layered realities from a comprehensive perspective and they also started looking into you know inequity and lack of allocation of resources and how race was a key variable, key social variable you know and how it was also people from the minority groups they were facing the brunt of it.

So, this book of Kenneth Jackson's book is quite important, but I think the most I mean important book in this regard is by Adam Rome, the Bulldozer in the Countryside again the title is itself it is like its self-explanatory and it is quite provocative. So, and he definitely he also like your Robert Gioielli he also trace the Rome also traces you know urban environmental activism. And he says that urban renewed urban environmental activism in the United State, it is an impact or it is an outcome you know of the of what is happening actually in the countryside. Since the post Second World War 2 period.

So, he talks about like how after this aftermath of this Second World War industrialization revamped you know revamped the housing sector and how national mortgage systems were redesigned. So, that you know the housing spree could actually be facilitated. Then he also talks about you know he draws our attention to this over reliance of automobiles, of petroleum of Americans on petroleum, on automobile due to this urban sprawl, due to this hyper suburbanization.

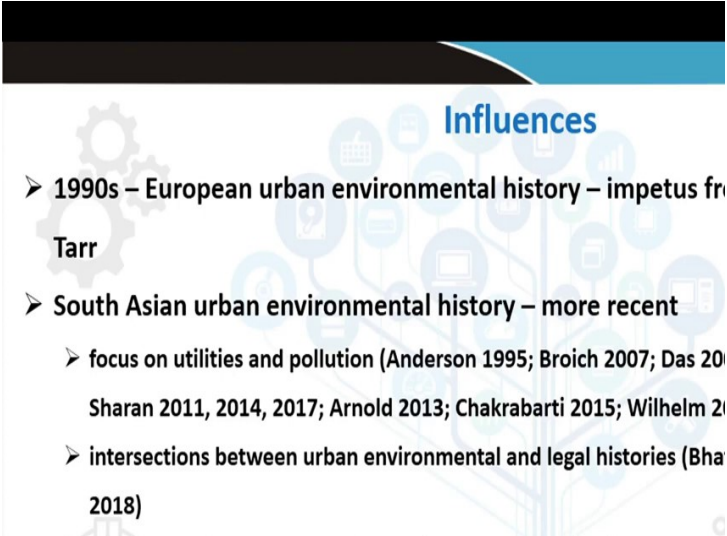
And also like you know polluting septic tanks and its impact again on the people who are racially and who are like socially vulnerable and marginalized groups. So, and definitely he makes a connection he establishes a correlation between you know the impact of this urban sprawl on this people and how these urban environmental activism got reenergized you know by all these forces.

So, and Rome also makes this comment he clearly blurts out that why and how urban environmental history this should be you know kind of understood as a comprehensive perspective in order to enabling us to capture these multi layered realities again you know as an enmeshed whole. So, this is about Rome's book and then we have another book by Robert Gioielli and Robert Gioiellis book.

So, in this book he talks about urban environmental activism in 3 cities the three cities of Baltimore, Saint Louis and Chicago. And he talks about you know the grassroots environmentalism steered and you know mobilized by the disadvantage the disadvantage people. The people of colour and who are economically who are economically exploited and who are extremely socially vulnerable and how they also protest you know against all sorts of environmental inequalities and environmental justices.

So, this is what I feel or what I understand as you know the urban environmental history in North America which has a very strong political ecology and environmental justice bent in it.

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Influences

- 1990s – European urban environmental history – impetus from Tarr
- South Asian urban environmental history – more recent
 - focus on utilities and pollution (Anderson 1995; Broich 2007; Das 2011; Sharan 2011, 2014, 2017; Arnold 2013; Chakrabarti 2015; Wilhelm 2018)
 - intersections between urban environmental and legal histories (Bha 2018)

So, coming to the final part of this discussion as I mentioned earlier urban environmental history in North America it has really caught a lot of attention and environmental historians addressing the urban issue in different parts of the world especially you know in the countries of Europe and in India, South Asia, India. So, they I mean historians have borrowed a lot you know borrowed frameworks, methodologies, approaches and paradigms from you know this particular scholarship.

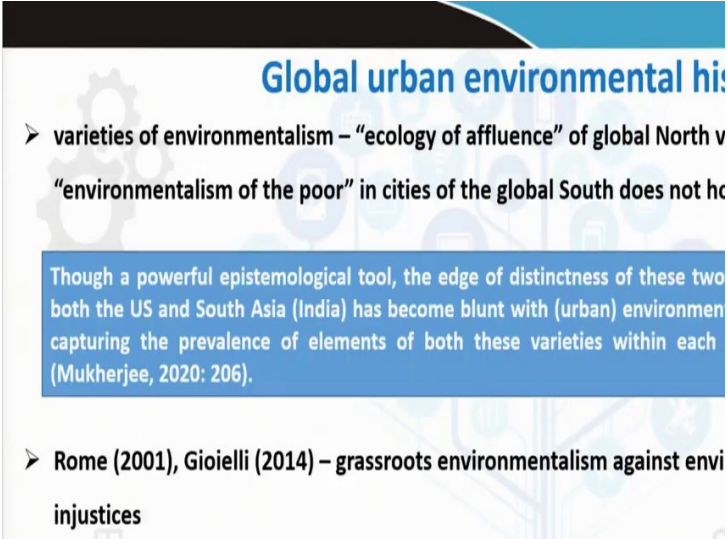
So, I like yes of course, this urban environmental history has actually given an impetus you know to scholars working or you know working on urban environmental intersections in different parts of the world. So, South Asian urban environmental history is very recent, but it is very interesting it is really taking a very interesting turn. There are few works on this now books only 3, 4 I guess, but some articles for sure and for example the works by Arnold and Awadhendra Sharan, Pratik Chakrabarti.

So, they focus on utilities and pollution and then there is a brilliant book which came out in 2016 by Janine Wilhelm this is on the sewerage technologies in the Ganga River. So, I will not go into details of South Asian urban environmental history in this lecture. But definitely there will be a lecture, there will be a lecture on these particular aspects South Asian urban environmental history. This will be quite interesting because you know we will see that how the same frameworks are there.

But you know how the frameworks also get informed through additional empirical insights because the context is South Asia. So, yeah so, there this fascinating book by the Debjani Bhattacharyya which you know kind of addresses intersections between urban environmental and legal histories again we will discuss this in that particular lecture on South Asian urban environmental history. And in my book also I had talked about you know sustainable flows between city and its larger ecological infrastructure.

So, the focus is on the sustainable flows. So, this is a book on Kolkata Kolkata's blue infrastructure. Again I will discuss this when I covered I mean when I expose you to this particular topic on South Asian urban environmental history. But for now you just have to remember that yes south Asian environmental scholars we really have been quite influenced by urban environmental history which emerge in the in America in the US in the 1990s and it is taking it is you know meandering turns. So, it is quite fascinating in that sense.

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Global urban environmental history

- varieties of environmentalism – “ecology of affluence” of global North v “environmentalism of the poor” in cities of the global South does not hold

Though a powerful epistemological tool, the edge of distinctness of these two both the US and South Asia (India) has become blunt with (urban) environmentalism capturing the prevalence of elements of both these varieties within each (Mukherjee, 2020: 206).

- Rome (2001), Gioielli (2014) – grassroots environmentalism against environmental injustices

So, this is the final slide, but I think this is going to be a bit heavy, but I think I mean the discussion is very important, because what is happening now is that you have to remember that more or less urban environmental history actually started its journey in 1990 and now it is 2021. So, almost like 3 decades now. So, and so far as environmental history is concerned roughly it is dated back to the 1960s it this is mainly like 1970s.

So, it means that 3 decades plus 2 decades, so 50 decades now of environmental history and more specifically 30. So, 50 years sorry 5 decades of environmental history 30 years or more specifically you know 3 decades of urban environmental history. Now, there is a very like how do I say; I mean there is a very influential book which was published in 1997 by Ramchandra Guha and Joan Martinez Alier and the name or the title of the book is varieties of environmentalism essays North and South.

So, there they argued that you know the agendas of the environmental historians in I mean historians are pursuing environmental history in America is markedly different from or has to be markedly different from the agenda of the historians pursuing environmental history in South Asia. Because the contexts are different so while you know in America the this, so they argued that you know environmental activism or environmentalism gave birth to environmental history in both South Asia and America

But the if you see the nature of environmental activism in South Asia and America you will be able to you know see this difference. So, the distinctiveness lies in the fact that

while you know American historians were more concerned with these quote unquote wilderness issue, so for them nature was pristine nature right. So, think about Roderick Nash's book or you know George Moore's book for that matter or you know the books by Donald Worster not what is that you know in the strict sense.

But at least you know Richard White I can remember and all but the wilderness question was a major question so far as American history was concerned American environmental history is concerned. But South Asia it is it always has been you know this equation of ecology is absolutely it is inherently interlinked with the issue of livelihood. So, that is how the historians you know kind of distinguish between American environmental history and South Asian environmental history as ecology of affluence, versus environmentalism of the poor.

So, green agenda versus brown agenda. But if we take a deeper look into the urban context we find that for both you know this continents for both Asia and America, we have literature, we have scholarship where people or the historians are addressing both these issues. So, the both the wilderness issue and also the environmental justice perspective.

So, we have seen in American history that how initially you know the scholars were talking about you know wilderness, but then they were talking about more hardcore issues like technical infrastructure. But then now they are absolutely you know they are talking about like environmental activism or grassroots activism, where this activism or environmentalism is being steered by this these advantaged groups.

So, the issue of survival the issue of equality the issue of justice it is absolutely dealt you know in the in it is in this kind of urban activism, urban environmental activism or urban environmentalism which has facilitated urban environmental history. So, that trend is also there. So, no more we can say that you know that it is just nature for nature sake, but nature not for the sake of survival. So, this is also now the case, so far as the American historians are concerned.

Similarly, in South Asia what we see is that you know Amita Baviskar has come up with this term called bourgeois environmentalism and this we will discuss when we discuss urban political ecology in detail again as an urban social science, urban environment social science framework. So, in India we find or in South Asia we find you know there

are there is activism where heritage conservation is send where you know like people they are more concerned with elitist issues.

So, there I mean so Amita Baviskar says that this is kind of middle class environmentalism, where people want to people express their interest to breathe you know clean air, so they protest against pollution. But you know they are more in claimant more inclined to beautification initiatives and activities. So, the kind of environment that they think of or the way they think about you know environmental preservation the protection that also at the same time snuffs out or removes the urban subaltern from the scene.

On the other hand there are grassroots urban there is grassroots urban activism where the protesters only talk about you know the protection of human rights for the people or for the squatting people in big cities like Delhi or Kolkata or Bangalore or Mumbai or Chennai for that matter. But I think I would like to complicate it further I am ensuring this is the last level of complication.

But yes I think I would like to complicate it further by saying that this varieties of environmentalism elitist environmentalism, middle class environmentalism, authoritarian environmentalism, grassroots environmentalism in the urban space it gets more complicated. Even you know it furthermore gets complicated for both America, South Asia for any other urban context if you concentrate on the nature of a particular movement. Because you will see within a particular movement how these various strands of activism actually you know exist.

So, this will not get clear right now, but I think you will get lot of clarity on what I am saying right now when I would actually expose you to the Kolkata case study, to the blue infrastructures book. Which will show that you know all these various strands of urban environmental activism also are prominent in some of the movements, some of the single movements you know for us with a single cause actually not a single cause. But single cause with multiple sub causes I would say, so you know it is quite complicated.

So, what is important more important is not to concentrate on these varieties of environmentalism in a linear way. But even to trace you know different varieties within a sub variety and hence it is important for us to get into a detailed textured and see the last line, the last sentence which I write here and I borrow from you know Ernstson and

Sorlin's recent book. And it is a fascinating this is the reference is there you should go through this book at least the introduction you know it is called *Grounding Urban Nature*.

So, there they say and I borrow from them and I also had my own insights when I say that it is why it is important for us to you know get into a detailed textured situational analysis along particular geographies. And lessons can be learnt from and for multiple elsewhere.


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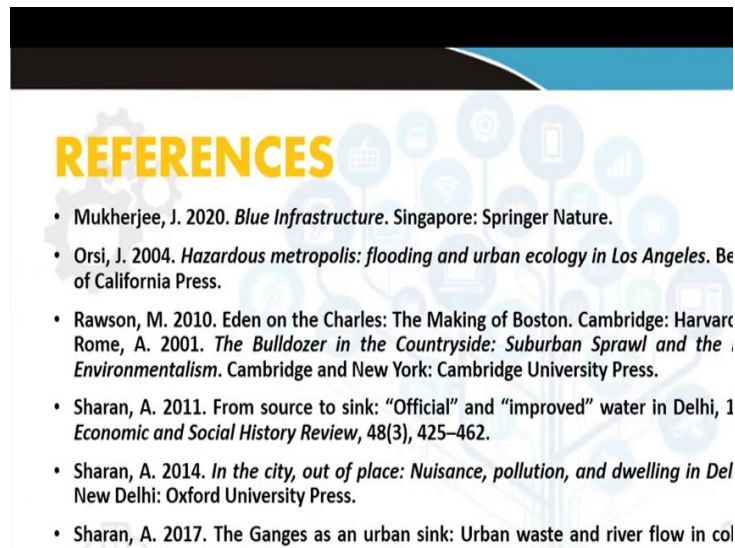
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CONCLUSION: Key highlights

- urban disasters, sprawl and inequity in US UEH – a U
- varieties of urban environmentalism – single strike o brush inadequate
- towards a global urban environmental history?

So, and then it explains you know why it is important for us to finally, move towards a more global urban environmental history. And by more global we are not saying that you know it would just be a global the way you know unfortunately global prescriptions are suggested by global organizations like United Nations. But here this worlding also parallelly would kind of this worlding would have it will have the element of grounding concurrently in it.

So, there will be a parallel process of grounding and worlding together. So, very detailed case study based approach. But at the same time to identify commonalities you know common historical trajectories, specificities involved you know in shaping, reshaping, making and unmaking and remaking of urban environments.

Where for example, you know the city of Kolkata can learn from the city of Arles and the city of Arles in France. For example, on the bank of the Rhone and or on the Rhone delta and the city of Kolkata on the Ganga delta and how these two cities can actually learn from each other through a through the formulation of a more poised comparative urban tactic or technique.

So, it is it sounds a little ambitious, but I think our future to an extent lies in this very nuanced global comparative urban environmentalism or urban environmental history. So, this is what I think we are also up to and but this will get you know more and more clear it will get clearer when we learn more examples. You know the examples which kind of

have deployed these social sciences frameworks and inform these frameworks with more detailed empirical inputs and insights.

So, yes in this lecture we have covered more thematic variations in urban environmental history in the US, concentrating on urban disasters, sprawl and inequity as themes inequality as themes in US UEH. And also how you know the grassroots environmental history or the environmental history which talks about or which sketches you know the grassroots urban activism, also has a kind of a UPE bent in it urban political ecology, urban environmental justice bent in it.

And what we want to argue here what I want to argue here is that I mean there are varieties of urban environmentalism and even within a particular movement you will be able to trace different varieties together multiple layers and multiple strands. So, it is impossible to sketch everything you know with the single strike of the brush. So, this approach is remains inadequate.

And finally, is it the right opportune moment right now to kind of think about perceive pursue, pursue will come later. But at least to think about and about you know or to think about a pathway through which global urban environmental history can be forged and crafted.

So, thank you