
By:

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Environmental Accountability

In December of 2008 an article was published in The Military Times explaining that the state of Maryland was suing the United States Army for environmental hazards that the army had caused at its base at Fort Meade. According to the lawsuit the contamination, “is at concentrations that indicate that there may be an imminent and substantial threat to human health and the environment”. The article did, however, make the assertion that the Army was cooperating with the EPA to clean up the site. In the words of Maryland Attorney General Doug Gansler, “The Army is heading in the right direction by expressing willingness to comply with the EPA order”. The fact that the United States Army admitted guilt in this incident marks a new trend when it comes to the American military taking responsibility for environmental problems. This trend had been evolving in several different environmental cleanup cases in such places as the Philippinnes and Argentia, Newfoundland. However, the Army had once completely denied any involvement in environmental damage that it had caused, raising several questions about
weapons and the harm they cause to the landscape. Why would the United States Government store weapons and material that could cause environmental damage on the sites of their bases both within the United States and around the world? The work of psychologist Harry Harlow, from the University of Wisconsin begins to answer these questions.

Harry Harlow, Rhesus Monkeys, and the Environment

Harlow hypothesized that when he separated a group of baby rhesus monkeys from their mothers and gave them a choice of a wire surrogate mother who had food, and a terrycloth mother who did not, the Monkeys would choose the terrycloth mother, and indeed his theory was proven to be correct. When a frightening object was introduced into the cage the monkeys would run to the terrycloth mother for security. His theory was proven right again when the monkeys and their “mothers” were placed into a strange environment. The animals would cling to the terrycloth mother until they felt safe enough to get down and explore. Harlow drew one important conclusion from his experiment: monkeys will instinctively seek out security, even though it may not provide them with food. Harlow also surmised that since humans and the rhesus monkey share 90% of their genetic makeup, a human child would act in a similar way. This then indicates that when given the choice, people will choose security over environmental protection.

Applying Harlow to Global Problems

Countries around the world, including the United States, are facing a dilemma: a way to juggle the issues of environmental protection and national security. By focusing on one issue, the other is neglected. This is seen most clearly when it comes to nuclear weapons. Until the year 2000, the trend among the world’s superpowers indicates that national security was more important than environmental protection. Government leaders around the world put more emphasis on staying safe than being green. Since the year 2000, a movement has been taking place to move away from this philosophy, but it has not yet reached its full potential. The overriding belief on this subject remains that human beings value security over every other want or need, including environmental protection and, according to Harlow, food.

Cold War Safety and Current Issues: Newfoundland, Canada

In September an article appeared in the Chicago Sun Times titled “Pollution Hinders Old United States Base In Newfoundland”, that stresses the apparent love-hate relationship between the United States servicemen stationed at Argentia, and the Canadian civilians who called the small town home. According to the article, Americans “left a legacy of friendship, poignant memories, and thousands of marriages with Newfoundlanders, which helped forge a special bond between the people in the province and many in the United States”. However, these “poignant memories” may have been forgotten when Canadian health inspectors tested the waters in the bay off Argentia and made a startling discovery. Thousands of pounds of discarded military equipment at the ocean’s bottom were discovered, allegedly dumped by the Americans during the period when the base was active. Evidence also suggests that Americans had stored nuclear weapons on the site without informing the Canadian Government, a violation of international law. Although an agreement was reached in the fall of 1996, the United States would not accept that it violated any international treaty, a notion that became a sticking point in the long negotiations and the United States remained adamant that they had not broken any laws. This incident
is not isolated to Argentia, Newfoundland, as similar problems have sprouted up at U.S. naval bases both at home and abroad. Although the U.S. military is taking positive action to rectify these environmental injustices, the past trend indicates that humans value safety over the environment.
The World Dilemma: National Security vs. Environmental Protection

In December of 2008 an article was published in that month’s edition of The Military Times explaining that the state of Maryland was suing the United States Army for environmental hazards that the army had caused at its base at Fort Meade. According to the wording of the lawsuit the contamination, “is at concentrations that indicate that there may be an imminent and substantial threat to human health and the environment”. (Witte) The article did, however, make the assertion that the Army was cooperating with the EPA to clean up the site. In the words of Maryland Attorney General Doug Gansler, “The Army is heading in the right direction by expressing willingness to comply with the EPA order”. (Witte)

The fact that the United States Army admitted guilt in this incident marks a new trend when it comes to the American military dealing with environmental problems. This trend had been evolving in several different environmental cleanup cases in such places as the Philippines and Argentia, Newfoundland. The fact that the Army had once completely denied any involvement in environmental damage that it had caused raises several questions about weapons and the harm they cause to the landscape. Why would the United States Government store weapons and material that could cause environmental damage on the sites of their bases both within the United States and around the world? I believe that the answers to these questions can be found in the work of psychologist from the University of Wisconsin by the name of Harry Harlow

Between 1953 and 1960 American psychologist Harry Harlow conducted a number of similar experiments in his lab at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Harlow hypothesized that when he separated a group of baby rhesus monkeys from their mothers and gave them a choice of a wire surrogate mother who
had food, and a terrycloth mother who did not, they would choose the terrycloth mother. His theory was indeed proven to be correct. When a frightening object was introduced into the cage the monkeys would always run to the terrycloth mother for security. His theory was proven right again when the monkeys and their “mothers” were placed into a strange environment. The animals would cling to the terrycloth mother until they felt safe enough to get down and explore. Harlow drew one important conclusion from his experiment: that monkeys will instinctively seek out security even though it may not provide them with food. Harlow also surmised that, since humans and the rhesus monkey share 90% of their genetic makeup, a human child would act in much the same way. (People and Discoveries)

Harry Harlow’s rhesus monkey experiment helps to answer the question I posed earlier. Countries around the world, including the United States, are facing a dilemma. This dilemma is the fact that they have got to find a way to juggle the issues of environmental protection and national security. The problem that they face is the idea that focusing on one issue often coincides with neglecting the other. This is seen most clearly when it comes to nuclear weapons. Up to about the year 2000 the trend among the world’s superpowers was that concentrating on national security was more important than focusing on environmental protection. Government leaders around the world are putting more emphasis on staying safe than being green. I believe that, since the year 2000, a movement has been taking place to move away from that philosophy. I must say, however, that I do not believe that this movement has gained much steam, yet. The overriding belief on this subject remains that human beings value security over every other want or need, including environmental protection and, according to Harlow, even food.

In searching for articles and books which address this topic, I came across three which offer differing viewpoints from each other and, indeed, different from my own. In 2001 Cambridge University Press printed a book entitled Mao’s War Against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China. The book was written by author Judith Shapiro, who is a professor at American University in Washington, D.C. Within the pages of her book, Shapiro examines the relationship between Mao Zedong’s policies and the Chinese environment. She claims that Mao ignored the “traditional Chinese ideal” which stated ‘Harmony between the Heavens and Humankind’. Instead, the dictator believed in a new theory, which read ‘Man Can Conquer
Nature”. Mao put his ideas into practice at an alarming rate, according to Shapiro. The results of his plan to bend nature to do the will of men had terrible consequences for both humans and the environment.

I believe Shapiro’s book to be a great work in the sense that she finally sheds light on the environmental policies of Mao Zedong. However, I feel I must take issue with at least one of the conclusions which she draws. Shapiro claims that abuse of the environment often goes hand in hand with the abuse of human beings. Although I believe that this analysis is correct when referring to Mao’s China, it lacks a global precedent. I believe that the case of Mao’s China is an unusual occurrence. Never before, and never since, has the world seen such an outright campaign by a certain country to bring the natural world within its borders to its knees.

Although I must add that I believe in a sense that Shapiro’s book is a great example of the theory that I put forth above. In her book she illustrates vividly the ruthlessness of Mao’s policies on the natural world in China. In fact, Mao seems not to care about the environment at all, the only things he seems to relish is his own political gain and safety. This would put him on the far end of the spectrum when it comes to juggling national security with environmental concerns. He seems to be willing and indeed happy to drop the ball on environmental concerns as long as his agenda is fulfilled.

While Judith Shapiro puts the blame of China’s horrible environmental problems on the shoulders of Mao Zedong, other educated people put the blame for their nations’ environmental recklessness on themselves. In the March 1988 issue of the Annals of the Association of American Geographers I came across a piece entitled “Geographers and Nuclear War: Why We Lack Influence On Public Policy”. The article is written by Susan Cutter, who is a member of the Geography faculty at Rutgers University. In her essay Ms. Cutter argues that, “Issues of nuclear war and deterrence are inherently geographical, yet our disciplinary literature is either silent on the subject or poorly focused. The result is very little impact on public policy”. Cutter continues by asserting that she contributes the geography fields’ lack of ability to stop nuclear build up to two problems. These two problems are, “the lack of a comprehensive geographic theory to explain the impact of nuclear war and the fragmentation of the discipline”.

I believe Susan Cutter’s essay to be a great tool for improving the field of geography. However, I also have to point out one major flaw in her argument. She states that she feels that, as geographers, her
colleagues as well as herself were responsible for coming up with a ‘geographic theory’, as she calls it, to explain that nuclear weapons were harmful to the environment. She seems to feel guilty that they were not able to convince American government officials of the dangers that nuclear weapons, and war in general, pose to the natural environment.

What must be asked here is “How much proof do the government officials need?” Do they not remember the harm that the A-bombs caused to the natural environment in Japan, or the devastating effects that Agent Orange had in the jungles of Vietnam? Ms. Cutter is being too hard on herself and her profession. The point here is that it is human nature to care about the well being of ourselves over the well being of our environment. Ms. Cutter can present any kind of new geographical evidence to the leaders of the United States that she pleases, but in the end it would be all for nothing. The willingness to use weapons which harm the environment stems from the human psychology, and no geographic evidence can change that fact. Ms. Cutter’s article does have it’s positive aspects, however. She lays out a general groundwork for how she believes that the profession of geography can improve itself. Also, for the purposes of my argument, she provides me with an opposing view on why world leaders choose national security over environmental protection.

The final piece of literature I looked at was found in World Watch and was written by author Sarah DeWeerdt. The article is entitled “War and The Environment” and within it Ms. DeWeerdt examines how several wars, including World War II and Vietnam, have effected the environment in which they were fought. Not surprisingly, the author points out that most wars most certainly have ‘ecological consequences’ on the landscapes on which they were fought for years to come. Interesting enough, though, DeWeerdt claims that wars are not the only causes of such damage to the environment. She cites the work of Dr. John Hart, who claimed that warlike environmental destruction could be caused by such things as floods and earthquakes. DeWeerdt concludes by asserting that, while Hart’s claims may have applied more correctly to wars fought in the pre-modern era, his theory just doesn’t apply to the modern battlefield where such environmentally destructive weapons as bombs and tanks are often employed.

DeWeerdt’s article indeed sheds some light on the reasons why war causes such damage on the environments in which they are fought. Unlike Cutter and Shapiro, DeWeerdt does not attempt to lay blame
on anyone for the harm done on the environment by weapons and war. However, the essay fails to point out ways in which we, as humans, can limit wars and the damage that they cause on the environment.

The literature I located pertaining to the topic of the relationship between environmental protection and national security had its strengths and weaknesses, as literature on any topic does. While Judith Shapiro’s book gives us an excellent account of the atrocities leveled by Mao Zedong against both people and nature in revolutionary China, I believe she fails to include the mental aspects of those atrocities. Meanwhile, Susan Cutter’s article, while it may be a great tool to be used for self improvement by geographers, is mistakenly chocked full of blame for geographers for the failure of American government officials to reduce environmentally unfriendly nuclear weapons. The fact that the leaders of the entire world have paid more attention to national security than to environmental protection cannot be blamed on one discipline or profession.

Sarah DeWeerdt’s article gives her reader a full background on how destructive waging war can be on the landscape on which it is waged. She does fail, however, to explain why war is waged and how we can prevent it in the future, or at least prevent it from destroying the environment. As a whole I would argue that this literature gives its readers a good background into the subject of war on the environment (DeWeerdt) as well as good examples of the horrors that humans can inflict on that environment (Shapiro). I must reiterate, however, that I believe that more needs to be written on the mental aspects of this trend of caring more about one’s safety than the safety of the environment. I firmly believe that the experiments done by Harry Harlow in the late 1950’s are a gateway through which we can find some answers. I also believe that in order to fully understand this trend and the recent counter-trend, one must look at several examples of the aforementioned trend.

In September of 1995 a reporter for the Chicago Sun Times by the name of Craig Turner wrote an article for his newspaper entitled Pollution Hinders Old United States’ Base In Newfoundland. Turner’s article stresses the apparent love-hate relationship between the United States servicemen stationed at Argentia, and the Canadian civilians who called the small town home. According to Turner the Americans “left a legacy of friendship, poignant memories, and thousands of marriages with Newfoundlanders, which helped forge a special bond between the people in the province and many in the United States”. #
Those “poignant memories” may have been forgotten, however, when Canadian health inspectors tested the waters in the bay off Argentia and made a startling discovery. They located thousands of pounds of discarded military equipment at the ocean’s bottom, apparently dumped there by the Americans during the period when the base was active. As if this alone was not bad enough, some evidence appeared pointing to the fact that the Americans had stored nuclear weapons on the site without informing the Canadian Government, which is a violation of international law.

The United States established a naval base at Argentia, Newfoundland, Canada, at the outset of World War II. The base was originally designed as a jump off point for operations by the United States Navy against German U-Boats in the North Atlantic. The base was also the location of several secret strategy meetings involving Winston Churchill and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The United States insisted that the base remained open after the surrender of the Axis Powers in order to conduct operations against a new threat: Communism. The base served as a naval support and intelligence station throughout the Cold War years. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990’s the base really had no great purpose for the first time in fifty years. The United States Government therefore closed the base in 1994 and gave the land back to the Canadians. Unfortunately, land is not the only thing that the Americans gave back.

Soon after the departure of the US military from the area, Canadian health officials received complaints about environmental hazards located in the area of the former base. When those officials investigated they made a startling discovery: barrels of toxic waste as well as other materials had been dumped into the bay off the coast of Argentia, apparently by the American servicemen. When this news reached the ears of the government officials of Canada, they were not at all pleased. In fact, they demanded that the United States foot the estimated $81 million dollar clean up bill. The Americans refused to do any such thing, they also denied having dumped anything into the bay off Argentia’s coast.

After much political wrangling and squabbling between the governments of the United States and Canada, an agreement was reached in the fall of 1996. The terms of this agreement are as follows: the US government would pay the Canadians $100 million over a ten year time span from 1996 to 2006. However, the United States would not accept that it violated any international treaty or agreement. This last notion was
a sticking point in the long negotiations. Even when the two sides came to an agreement, the United States remained adamant that they had not broken any laws.

This can be plainly seen in the wording of the documents that were exchanged before the agreement took place on October 7, 1996. In a letter written to the Acting Secretary of State, Earl Anthony Wayne, Canadian Ambassador Raymond Chretien wrote the following: “It is the view of the United States Government that it has no legal obligation under current United States and international law to reimburse the costs of environmental clean up at the four former military installations described above”.

Two days later, on October 9th, the Canadians sent a response letter to Secretary Wayne. The letter read in part, “I have the honor to inform you that the United States Government’s proposal contained therein is acceptable to the Government of Canada. However, contrary to the views of the United States Government, it is the view of the Government of Canada that the Government of the United States has legal obligations under international law to pay claims for the environmental clean up of these former United States military installations”.

The agreement was a tenuous one at best. Both sides seemed not to be on the same page, so to speak. While the United States gave the Canadians the money for the clean up, they did not take full responsibility for their actions. In the end, this is what many in the Canadian public wanted to see happen. Among the Canadian public, the agreement was seen as a slap in the face. They believed that the Americans had gotten the better of the deal and that Canadian officials who agreed to it had made a horrible mistake.

The displeasure of the Canadian people with the deal and those Canadian officials who agreed to it could be seen all over the Canadian media in the months after the agreement was signed. In November of 1996 a Canadian news broadcast lambasted both the American and Canadian Governments. The broadcast covered the recent meeting between the Vice President of the United States, Al Gore, and Sergio Marchi, a Canadian Environmental minister. The CBC reporter, Sasa Petricic, refers to the agreement that the two men came to as being an under the table deal. During the broadcast Petricic states, “What he (Marchi) doesn’t talk about is another environmental deal quietly signed between Ottawa and Washington last fall-one that leaves Canada paying most of a massive US mess to clean up buried million gallon fuel tanks after the US military left its former naval base in Newfoundland”.
Complaints about the agreement not only came from the Canadians, but from the American side as well. In 2005, nearly a decade after the agreement was signed, a former US Marine came forward and claimed that his bone cancer came as a result of the nuclear materials he had guarded while stationed at the Argentia naval base. The story of Almon Scott was first reported by Randy Boswell, a reporter for the Ottawa Citizen. In an article written in May of 2005, Boswell reports that Scott had contacted Florida Congressman Mark Foley and asked him for assistance. Foley agreed to help the ailing Marine, who has been diagnosed with multiple melanoma, which is directly related to radiation. Boswell’s article cites Congressman Foley as saying that he is interested in the case because, “Mr. Scott is near death and the fact that there may be broader issues involved”. Those broader issues would be the legality of having nuclear warheads on foreign soil without the host nations’ approval.

The issue of the actions taken by the United States Government following the Argentia incident is a complicated one. It involves interpretation of complicated international law and relations between the United States and Canada. As the Canadian Broadcast System news program and the story of Almon Scott show, this issue is still a hot one for both the Canadians and the Americans.

It is important to realize that the incident which took place at the United States naval base at Argentia, Newfoundland is not an isolated event. In fact, the US military seems to have a long rap sheet of wreaking havoc on the environment in a number of places, both at home and abroad. In 2003, Kakuya Ishida, a reporter for the Japanese based newspaper The Daily Yomuri, penned an article which described the pollution which was left at a former US army base located just outside of Manila, in the Philippines. The pollution has had devastating health effects for the local residents. According to Ishida, “Among the children, Micah Mesiano, 5, suffers from cerebral palsy and has paralyzed limbs”. Ishida also reports that several families who live near the abandoned base have filed a lawsuit against the government of the United States. The lawsuit claims that the American military had left barrels of toxic PCB and other hazardous materials all over their base when they left. Interestingly enough, PCB was the same sludge that was found at the bottom of Argentia Bay by the Canadian health inspectors in 1994.

Just as in the Argentia mishap, the American government denied any wrongdoing in this case. But they did say that they would help pay for the clean up which had already started in the area. This situation is
eerily similar to the agreement that the United States made with Canada after the Argentia incident in October 1996. So why does the United States military tend to cause environmental havoc whenever they leave a base? Also, why do they always deny any wrongdoing but agree to help fund the clean up efforts? These questions must lead us to a set of broader questions, ones that not only effect the United States, but the world as a whole. Questions such as, “Why do countries knowingly violate international treaties, even if the treaties are between to allies?”. Perhaps the more relevant question here would be, “Why would a country store nuclear warheads in places where they could do horrible damage to the environment?”.

Although I am unable to answer all of the questions I have just posed, I will tackle the last one. It is human nature to desire security, both for ourselves and for the ones we love. Security is the first priority for every person, as well as every nation, on earth. The fact of the matter is that nations will violate treaties with other nations, even their allies, if they believe it is in the best interests of the citizens of their nation. This can be seen in how the Americans have dealt with the accusations leveled at them by the Canadians and Filipinos.

In accordance with the need to feel secure, nations will seek out weapons to protect themselves. These weapons often include ones of the nuclear type. Soldiers from the United States, as well as other nations, care more about the safety of themselves and the other citizens of their country than about the possible environmental affects that such weapons can have.

I think that it is important to point out here that the United States Government has been accepting responsibility in the past five years for their environmental problems. This was not the case during the aftermath of the Argentia incident in the early 1990’s. Could this be a sign that times are changing when it come to this issue? I am not so optimistic, I believe that the overwhelming trend still points to the nations of the world regarding personal safety above environmental safety. Why? As Harry Harlow would attest to if he were still alive, “It’s only natural”.
As the sun sets on my academic career at Shippensburg University, I would like to take some time and reflect on the progress I have made both as a historian, and as a student in general. To that effect, in this paper I will construct a short historiography of some of my work here at Shippensburg. During the course of this paper, I will examine three of my previous papers, list the positives and negatives of each, and identify the areas of my scholarship that have improved over my years at this fine institution.

I believe that the most logical place to start a personal analysis of my academic career would be at the beginning. During my freshman year at Shippensburg, I was enrolled in a class entitled Introduction to International Politics. The class was taught by Professor Ken Warner. During the course of that class I wrote a paper which I called “In the Words Of Our Enemies”. The paper was a critique on the book of the same name written my Jed Babbin in the early 2000s. Within the paper I discuss the positive and negative aspects of Babbin’s book as well as the implications that the release of the book has had on a post September 11th United States.

I believe that I did an adequate job analyzing the book by using solid evidence which I found inside of the book itself. I also believe that I conveyed my personal beliefs on the subject of the book. This last task was required in the paper rubric. Since this paper was done early on in my collegiate career, it has some fundamental errors which I believe that I have fixed since my freshman year. The first of these blunders would be the fact that I did not cite the book properly in either my footnotes or my bibliography. In retrospect, perhaps I could have improved my paper by adding outside sources into my bibliography, thus supporting my opinion of the book with some ‘professional’ opinions.

During my junior year at Shippensburg University I was enrolled in a class entitled Theory and Practice. This particular Theory and Practice class was taught by Dr. David Godshalk. The final project of
this interesting class was a primary research based paper on a topic of our choice. The subject of my paper were the several small veterans organizations which were formed from the survivors of the Andersonville Prison Camp, which was operated by the Confederate States of America during the American Civil War. Apparently these organizations gave monetary assistance to their Andersonville comrades who fell on hard times. This stands as the first time in American history in which an organization was formed with the sole purpose of giving support to the mental and physical needs of a veteran.

Like all papers, this one had its strengths and weaknesses. One of the greatest strengths of the paper, in my opinion, was the wide range of primary sources I was able to locate which related to this subject. Perhaps most helpful in this sense was the online archives of the New York Times, which ran many stories about the activities of the Andersonville veteran’s organizations in the years following the Civil War. However, the paper also had its flaws as well as areas where I could have done more to improve the quality of the piece. I decided early on in the paper that I would try to avoid using sources which could not be found within the walls of the Ezra Lehman Memorial Library located on campus. Well, the library’s range of materials is certainly not the best in the world, therefore I missed an opportunity to explore the realm of our own on campus library. I could have enhanced the effectiveness of my paper by traveling to Harrisburg or maybe even the Nation Washington, D.C. Making these trips would have also helped me enhance my knowledge. I finally visited these places during my capstone class.

In the first semester of my senior year at Salve Regina University in the Senior History Seminar/Capstone seminar required for History B. A. majors. The section in which I was enrolled by Dr. Allen Dieterich was one of the class was to write a twelve page research driven paper which placed some importance on the role of nature in the lives of humans. This was no ordinary paper, however. In the words of Dr. Dieterich-Ward, it would be, “the best damn twelve pages you’ve ever written.” I made the focus of my paper the dilemma which all nations around the globe face of trying to balance national security and environmental protection. I put forth the idea that humans, by nature, value security over every other need, including the well being of the environment around them. That is why the leading countries of the world continue to pollute the air with nuclear fumes and waste.

I believe that I have reached the pinnacle of my undergraduate career with the completion of this paper. The time and effort that I have put into this one paper has exceeded all of the others that I have done in
my life as a student up to this point. I would like to mention the two things that I am the most proudest of in this paper. The first was the level of primary research that I put into it, I finally conquered my fear of archives and traveled to the National Archives twice during the course of my research. The second is that fact that I was able to include scientific backing to my argument, via the experiments of Harry Harlow.

The path that I have taken at Harrisburg Area Community College and at Shippensburg has been a long and difficult one, indeed. Along the way, I have learned a great deal of things that will help me on my journey to becoming a better historian and a better person in general. The three papers that I mentioned above are evidence of the path that I have taken and the struggles that I faced along that path. From my inability of cite sources correctly in the first paper to my fear conquering trip to the archives in the last, my journey to this point has been filled with its ups and downs. But one thing that I have realized is that the professors at both HACC and Shippensburg have given me the tools I need to be a successful historian and citizen. For that, I am indeed grateful to every last one of