

Kathleen Mapes
Associate Professor
History Department
Sabbatical Leave Proposal

A semester sabbatical leave during the 2007-2008 academic year would provide me much needed time to continue research on a book project that I have provisionally entitled “Rural Panaceas: Remaking the Industrial Landscape, 1850-1950.” This book will explore four cases in which urban industrial actors—including industrialists, state and rural reformers, and immigrant advocates—looked to the countryside as a way to solve the supposed ills of urban industrial America. The first section of the book will explore programs pursued by both Protestant and Catholic philanthropists to place orphaned children with rural farm families. Because both religious groups believed that urban youths would be reformed morally and physically by relocating them to the countryside, this section of the book will allow me to explore ideas about the regenerative power of the countryside as well as changing norms regarding childhood. The second case study I plan to research includes programs to colonize the nation’s most recent southern and eastern European immigrants in the countryside. Some of these programs were run by immigrants seeking economic opportunities while other programs were run by native-born whites who saw relocation as the best way to Americanize the nation’s most recent immigrants. Exploring these efforts will allow me to examine how Americans envisioned rural America as solving the nation’s immigration problems while also allowing me the opportunity to unearth the ways that race and ethnicity transformed rural America.

The third section of the book will look at efforts by industrialists to build factories in rural America as a way to forestall class conflict. More specifically, I will explore the nationally well known case of George Pullman, who located his Pullman Car Works in the rural environs surrounding Chicago as a way to address the intractable class conflicts that had become a hallmark of urban America. Finally, the last section of the book will explore the New Deal Subsistence Homestead program (instituted by President Franklin Roosevelt) to resettle unemployed factory workers on subsistence homesteads. Roosevelt hoped that urban residents unable to secure work in the nation’s cities would solve their problems by living in rural America, producing their own food, and working part time in local factories. Running counter to the largest New Deal farm programs, which tended to lead toward land consolidation and industrial agriculture, the Subsistence Homesteads provide an example of ways to intertwine industry and agriculture on a small-scale basis. Each of these case studies offers an opportunity to explore the most important topics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—immigration, race, labor, childhood, and industrialization, and the state—while also

historicizing the countryside.

This work will challenge the general historical tendency to treat modernization as a distinctly urban phenomenon. Instead it will demonstrate that rural America was not only transformed by modernization but that modernization cannot be fully understood without considering the role of the countryside. Historians have begun to rethink their urban-based assumptions, prodded in part by the growing awareness today of the central role rural America continues to play with respect to global trade and immigration politics. For example, recent debates concerning a possible guest worker program, organic food, and industrial agriculture demonstrate that some of the most pressing issues facing modern America have distinctly rural roots. My proposed book project “Rural Panaceas” will allow us to look historically and critically at rural America as well as at the intersection of rural and urban America. Moreover, by transcending a number of historical sub-disciplines including labor, rural, immigration, ethnic, and state-centered histories, this book will directly challenge our tendency to equate the urban sectors of society with modernity while assuming that the rural realm represents the past.

Since I have just finished my first book, *Sweet Tyranny: Migrant Labor, Industrial Agriculture, and the Politics of Imperialism, 1898-1940* (forthcoming University of Illinois Press, 2007), I am still in the early stages of the new project. A semester sabbatical would provide me much needed time to continue a thorough literature review of the relevant secondary works, and, even more importantly, to begin to unearth relevant primary sources. Much of this work can be done locally. Many of the primary sources including books, government hearings, government studies, and historical newspaper and journal articles can be ordered via interlibrary loan or can be accessed by using the ProQuest historical newspaper database. However, this project will also require a number of research trips to relevant archive collections including the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, where the Subsistence Homestead program papers are located; the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota, which houses the largest collection of primary sources related to immigration; and the Chicago Historical Society, where documents related to Pullman have been maintained. I anticipate spending an average of two weeks at each of the above mentioned locations.

By the end of the sabbatical leave, I plan to complete most of the research for the book. I also plan to write two articles—one on New Immigrants in the Countryside and one on the Subsistence Homestead Program—which will be turned into chapters as the book progresses. Having the opportunity to spend a semester pursuing research and writing will give me time to continue my active publishing agenda, and hence to continue to contribute to the historical discipline through scholarly

activity. This sabbatical will also add to my teaching substantively, since I regularly teach courses on rural America, immigration, labor, and modern industrial America. Finally, methodologically the sabbatical would help me to continue to teach young students to become historians and history teachers. Just this past month one student commented how he felt intimidated by professors who publish books, assuming that they would then be less understanding of the trials and tribulations students experience as they learn to research, think, and write. I told the student that for me, the opposite is true. Continuing to research and write means facing new challenges, putting one's ideas, research, and writing up for scrutiny and review, and hence experiencing what the students themselves go through each time they face the challenge of research and writing. In other words, through research and writing, I continue to be not just a professor but also a student of history.