

(pp. 102–94), and federal desegregation policies, Summers intertwines a history of a politics, local and federal, and how these shaped the care of individuals.

His analysis of the race relations between African American staff and their patients is a significant contribution beyond his work on physicians and their patients. The history of St Elizabeths Hospital, and the care of mentally ill individuals in general, is always greater than simply the physician–patient relationship (pp. 186–9, 237–9). Paying close attention to how both nurses and attendants experienced race relations and their lived experience of segregation within this institution is a powerful and poignant addition to the story Summers tells.

Summers' writing is dense, filled with primary source quotes, and the book is so rich with detail that the moments in which the author steps back to offer a big-picture analysis and narrative are particularly welcome. In fact, hearing more of a narrative within the details would have perhaps rendered the book more accessible. Regardless, Summers' book is a major contribution and will serve as a new standard for writing histories of psychiatric institutions.

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doi:10.1017/mdh.2020.27

Robert A. Voeks, *The Ethnobotany of Eden: Rethinking the Jungle Medicine Narrative* (Chicago IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2018), pp. xii + 321, \$43.00, hardback, ISBN: 9780226547718978.

Robert Voeks' *The Ethnobotany of Eden* holds out multiple attractions beyond its tantalising title. Not only is the book both readable and well documented but it displays an impressive sweep of time periods while offering examples often drawn from the author's firsthand experience in a wealth of different locations. Most of all, however, it is about the power of stories – in this case to forge particular ideas about tropical locations as well as the people who make their homes there. While crammed with useful information, the book is held together by a concern for shifting narratives that sometimes mingle and collide.

Voeks leads in with the claim that none of the myriad of stories and metaphors that have appeared over the centuries regarding the lands and peoples of the tropics has proved more compelling in recent decades than the 'jungle medicine narrative'. He then goes on to describe 'the simple plot that evolved organically in the 1980s' and its 'compelling cast of heroes and villains, conflicts and noble causes'. The accompanying story line that he examines has to do with both the tropical forests pictured as 'pristine, largely unknown to science, and home to mysterious and wise native people who are privy to great botanical secrets', as well as the more frightening flipside of these present in different renditions of what he calls 'The Environmental Claim'.

The narrative processes that Voek describes here in relation to the tropical environment are not new terrain for scholars. However, the actual case studies suggest the degree to which the jungle medicine narrative continues to throw up obstacles to a fuller vision of what actually exists. Speaking of contemporary women healers throughout much of the tropics, for instance, the author notes that while many of these persons 'may not deploy mystical powers and psychotropically charged visions to solve medical maladies', these same women are 'in many cases master herbalists' – a claim backed up by other researchers who have studied whether men or women know and made use of more medical

plant species. As for the loss of traditional plant knowledge that the jungle narrative threatens will inevitably occur when traditional healers move into more modern locations, Voaks cites varied examples of how people may both lose and acquire more traditional knowledge, depending on the situation.

The final chapter of the book describes the often ironic outcomes of a number of well-meaning attempts to protect nature from greedy capitalist forces in the case of the so-called Hamburger Connection of the 1980s that attributed much of tropical deforestation to US demand for artificially cheap beef. The fact that the situation on the ground in this case was actually more complex did not seem to matter to an impassioned public alarmed by these reports of rainforest destruction and the oxygen that humans would no longer breathe. This example leads Voaks to offer three principal points that he goes on to summarise.

The first of these is that while small groups of researchers may have no trouble grasping the importance of a multi-faceted environmental premise, public support depends upon the successful transformation of a wealth of convincing narrative threads into a single story. The second point is that fledgling environmental narratives are necessarily the product of 'equal portions of fragmentary scientific evidence, personal prejudices and nostalgic sentimentalism' that beat out scientific data in the battle for a good tale. The third has to do with the insertion of needed changes into environmental stories once these enter the realm of existing truths.

These three points underscore the limits of narrative and, as such, would initially seem to offer little space for hope. They suggest that the majority of human beings are largely condemned to the same old stories and that it is often all but impossible to get non-scientists to consider information that suggests a different conclusion. Indeed, I would note here, it is not just members of the general public who may cling to appealing accounts of the way the world works. Sometimes it is scientists, such as a number of researchers who adhered to the narrative of an Amazon devoid of large cities and advanced civilisations to question a particularly persuasive narrative that turned out to be questionable if not largely wrong for parts of the region. These persons were certainly quicker to embrace new research that acknowledged the presence of geoglyphs and a wealth of anthropogenic dark earth indicating a long and significant human presence in some locations. However, this in itself marvellous story, with all of its remaining environmental mysteries and implications for the present, has remained largely untold beyond research centres, university offerings, and select publications.

In this sense, the last lines of *The Ethnobotany of Eden* are among the book's most welcome. Here, Voaks notes that the mad dash to put new medical miracles upon the market characteristic of earlier decades appears, at least in part, to be subsiding. The more measured pace that has replaced it is in turn allowing ethnobotanists to focus on the healing possibilities of tropical nature as something that can help indigenous and immigrant people. This creates the possibility for scientists and tropical forest elders to work together in the time-consuming process of documenting a wealth of existing knowledge regarding healing plants for their communities.

There is, I would suggest, more implicit good news here that concerns the question of narratives, which tend to become more complex and varied as their tellers become more open to competing influences. These new elements may in some cases have the power to make the tellers think about what they are hearing and how older ideas might be rethought. The presence of such elements may also help to map out themes that imbue existing ideas with a new life that emerges from the unexpected sources that produce multiple or mingled

vocabularies. If the stories of the past can find a place in a more inclusive future that goes beyond the ethnobotanist and forest elders, this will be all the better.

While humanists and social scientists have far more varied interests in environmental matters today than they did in the past, their collaborations with different sorts of scientists in regard to narrative remains relatively rare. More frequent, programmed collaborations among a variety of disciplines would almost certainly strengthen an awareness of how stories work. It would also be conducive to ideas about how more socially and environmentally useful narratives might be generated and disseminated within different venues and among diverse sorts of people. Voeks' efforts merit a serious larger effort to go beyond what he describes as a Forest of Fables. Given where our world is, today would be a good time to start.

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