

Public Abstract

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This dissertation explores the ways in which human conceptions of nature inform conceptions of the limitations and possibilities of what humanity is capable of. The literature written about and/or in the Great Lakes region during the American early national and antebellum periods is shown to be particularly valuable for examining the connection between nature and human agency. This value is due in large measure to the Great Lakes being a site of drastic cultural and environmental change during the period, and the dissertation emphasizes the nuanced ways in which these changes are interconnected.