

## **Paper Proposal**

**Author:** Anthony DePaul Sadler

**Session Track:**

K. Environment, Geology, Natural History, Rivers, Parks, Conservation

V. Social Conditions, Social Life, and Customs

**Title:** “River of Sorrow, Land of the Sky: The Asheville Flood of 1916”

**Preface:** Natural disasters revealed bleak social realities during the southern industrial age. This study of the “great flood” of Asheville in 1916 revealed a the confluence of national and regional ideologies, a complex social power paradigm, and an environmental consciousness of one of the era’s largest and most developed Appalachian cities.

**Abstract from 150-250 words:**

The flooding of Asheville in 1916 provided new insight into the socio-economic conditions of Appalachia during industrialization. The interplay of social powered offers a new explanation for Appalachia’s role in American globalism.<sup>1</sup>

The flood disrupted society during a crucial period of economic resurgence. The city’s unique influence by northern elites placed pressure on Asheville’s leadership to quell the social disturbance. The result was Asheville’s rebirth with lasting

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<sup>1</sup> Sociologist Michael Mann developed a theory of social power based on the expansion of capitalism during the industrial age. He focused on the interrelation of economy, ideology, military, and politics within global empires. Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Volume 3: Global Empires and Revolution, 1890-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

reverberations. By the 1920s, the city experienced an era of opulence infused by the capital of “robber” barons, which implied a powerful but tenuous social caste system.<sup>2</sup>

This study adds a new dimension to Appalachian historiography, which contributes to the “many mountains” theme of diversified research of the southern Appalachians.

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**Biographical Summary (50-75 words):**

Anthony lives in Boone, North Carolina, with his wife and two cats. This paper is the basis for his master’s thesis. He will pursue a PhD in Environmental History with a focus on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century American South. His research interests are the relationship between societies and rivers, urban and industrial development, Appalachia and tourism, and the changing cultural value placed on the environment.

**Special requirements:**

Power Point

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<sup>2</sup> Appalachian environmental historians only touched on river disasters. Most notable of these are: *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1920* (1998), by Ronald L. Lewis; *Blue Ridge Commons: Environmental Activism and Forest History in Western North Carolina* (2012), by Kathryn Newfont, which focused primarily on late twentieth-century Asheville environmental activism; and Timothy Silver’s *Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountains: An Environmental History of the Highest Peaks in Eastern America* (2003).