Lovell argues that these letters tell an "optimistic" story about the potential of rights in contemporary society (p. 178) by countering notions that rights-based claims are inherently constraining or extravagant. His evidence shows that neither is the case: individuals who "made aspirational claims to legal entitlements" often establish the broader social significance of their grievance and frame their claims in terms of larger democratic interests (p. 184). Lovell's findings have enormous significance beyond their relevance to contemporary debates about the utility of rights-based activism; in particular, his work is suggestive of an intriguing hypothesis about the lost potential for a more expansive definition of civil rights. The letter writers often present strikingly broad conceptions of law and morality, evoking ideals of fairness, security, peacefulness, and democratic participation. Their notions of rights are often far more capacious than what has emerged in civil rights litigation, in which rights are often closely tied with group identity and comparable treatment. However, these letter writers are not well situated to see the cause of their situation as rooted in institutionalized failure (p. 196).

While civil rights doctrine has narrowly circumscribed the responsibility of the federal government to address personal grievances, these individuals often articulate a desire for a more responsive state that would address not only the problem experienced but provide for citizens' fundamental needs and protect against antidemocratic forces at the local level. Moreover, many of the letter writers offer haunting visions of the failures of federalism to address the vagaries of racism perpetrated and ignored by local officials and link these failures to inaction at the highest levels of government. Further research in a wide range of topics, including civil rights, legal consciousness, federalism, democratization, local governance, and racial politics, will greatly benefit from Lovell's thought-provoking reading of historical evidence and novel insights on the early foundations of a civil rights consciousness.

Defensive Environmentalists and the Dynamics of Global Reform. By Thomas K. Rudel. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xvi +251. $95.00.

Raymond Murphy
University of Ottawa

The very successes of modern rationalization (science, technology, the market, organization) in manipulating nature's dynamics are turning back against the global environmental commons (atmosphere, oceans, forests, ice covers, etc.) of seven billion humans, degrading the capacity of their natural environment to render them services. The harms of reflexivity in this sense have not been mitigated by purposive reflection: societies have failed to agree in international negotiations to modify their practices; few have undertaken internal changes at the needed scale and promptness to avoid en-

vironmental damage; local initiatives amount to drops in a very big bucket, and so on. Will the human population reform its practices on the necessary global scale, and if so, how? Thomas K. Rudel tackles these crucial and difficult questions in *Defensive Environmentalists and the Dynamics of Global Reform*. Optimists contend reforms will be successfully implemented, pessimists argue they won't: "This book says 'maybe yes,' but only when defensive environmentalists combine with more altruistically oriented activists to produce moments of environmental reform" (pp. 2–3).

Defensive environmentalism is defined as engaging in environmental protection that brings tangible, short-term personal benefits, whereas people practice altruistic environmentalism when they restore an environmental service that benefits everyone without giving them personal benefit. Having fewer children, recycling, efficient energy consumption, and eating organic foods are examples of the former, which is practiced disproportionately by upper classes, but found among all classes. Rudel is careful giving examples of altruistic environmentalists, stating that large-scale environmental NGOs and activists assume that posture on their websites (p. 12). He must be aware that antienvironmentalists deconstruct the altruism of Greenpeace, Al Gore, and so on, and attack them as hypocritical. The book first documents how globalization has resulted in a tightly coupled world system vulnerable to cascading catastrophes. Five chapters then describe cases in which the local environment was defended by small groups when it was degraded: Rudel examines resources, birth rates, foods, recycling, and energy conservation.

Why will defensive environmentalists become altruistic? For example, why will Americans protecting their own backyards in 2013 be motivated to scale up their actions into protecting the global atmosphere and oceans, Bangladesh, and people in 2100? Rudel's answer involves the experience of disasters or near disasters, conceived of as focusing events that result in a cultural shift: "The political impetus to create encompassing organizations only has enough force in the aftermath of extraordinary events that have created common-fate sentiments, [and] strengthened the appeal of altruistic environmentalism" (p. 25). Unlike "press" processes like population growth that gradually apply pressure, prompting defensive environmentalism, catastrophic events like floods constitute discontinuous "pulses" that suddenly create societal pressure propitious for a surge of altruistic environmentalism and reform. A classic example was the discovery of toxic waste under a school near Love Canal where defense of the local environment was scaled up into the creation of a Superfund in 1984 to clean all contaminated sites in the United States and legislate control over toxic waste disposal. Rudel explores how multiple disasters could mobilize people to construct a hegemonic sustainable development state. He argues convincingly that having to choose between local environmental actions or national (and presumably international) policies is a false choice: we need both.

This excellent book is documented with studies from around the world. It draws parallels between ecological processes and social dynamics, but

rejects the resilience-alliance framework and its adaptive cycle model because of its teleological tendencies and inevitable stages. He eschews recent fashionable trends among social scientists to dismiss fear as a motivator, instead making disasters, and thereby fear, central. The evidence from disaster research supports him: improvements in robustness, resilience, and preparedness have typically occurred after disaster arouses fear of recurrence. Rudel strives to avoid fatalism, but he correctly leaves open-ended the question of whether humans will reform their activities globally in time to mitigate harmful constructions of nature they have unleashed: "maybe yes" implies maybe no.

The argument breaks down, however, for several reasons. First, defensive environmentalism needs to be precisely demarcated from other types of defensive localism, NIMBY, or inverted quarantine, which can involve nonenvironmental or even antienvironmental motives and consequences. Defensive localism often has more to do with protecting property values or present lifestyle than protecting nature, and even true backyard environmentalism can undermine big-picture environmentalism. Defending one's house from the sight of windmills a mile away harms the atmosphere when the default option is fossil fuel. Second, although the experience of disaster is a powerful impetus, it does not always prompt significant reforms: researchers have documented that repeat disasters have occurred because many inhabitants refused to rebuild in a safer location. Third, global environmental degradation like anthropogenic climate change is a gradual "press" process of cumulative atmospheric carbon build-up, not a "pulse" phenomenon of tangible, imminent threats. Catastrophes occur after long time lags, and the huge location differences between fossil fuel–combustion causes and their calamitous consequences should be taken into account. Most fossil fuel–burning humans experience normal weather, punctuated rarely in a few places by extreme weather, with discontinuous permanent changes presently occurring only where few people live (the Arctic; near glaciers). Hence it is easy to deny global warming, be apathetic about it, or blame nature and refuse to reform practices. The fossil fuel industry reinforces inertia using the communication power of the media and influencing governments, and local communities economically benefiting from coal, tar sands, and so on, staunchly defend those polluting practices. Fourth, the book's conclusion that it will take catastrophes for altruistic environmentalism and global reform to emerge is not reassuring, especially because scientists warn that the planet may cross irreversible tipping points before cascading disasters occur. Fifth, the book seems to postulate authoritarian corporatist states as possible sources of environmental hegemony and reform but ignores societies achieving more significant successes. On every environmental index (Yale University, Germanwatch), social democratic countries score at or near the top, much better than East Asian states taken as models for developing sustainability. This finding suggests the possibility of learning from social democratic sustainability rather than from authoritarian corporatism. Despite the above shortcomings, this su-

perb book makes a valuable contribution not only for what it contains but also for stimulating reflection about issues like these.

Democracy and the Left: Social Policy and Inequality in Latin America. By Evelyne Huber and John D. Stephens. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. Pp. xx+342. $27.50.

Lane Kenworthy
University of Arizona

Democracy and the Left is one of the first systematic examinations of income inequality in a middle- or low-income region. It's an excellent book—required reading for students of inequality, democracy, and Latin America.

Evelyne Huber and John Stephens ask what determines variation in income inequality across countries and over time in Latin America. They also examine poverty, but I'll focus here, as they do, on inequality. They conduct quantitative analyses using data for all 18 Latin American nations from 1971 to 2005, in-depth historical within-case analyses of five countries, and a comparison of two most-similar cases from outside the region (Portugal and Spain) with four Latin American cases. Their analyses are thorough and careful, and they are appropriately cautious in their inferences.

Huber and Stephens conclude that in Latin America democracy has been the most influential contributor to low income inequality. It helps in two ways. First, democracy makes it more likely that left parties will hold the government. Left parties reduce income inequality by expanding access to education, rejecting inegalitarian policy orientations encouraged by international economic agencies such as the International Monetary Fund, and steering government transfers in a propoor direction. Second, democracy fosters competition for votes between parties of the Left and Right, so even the Right behaves in a somewhat egalitarian fashion when in power.

The hypothesis is compelling. Authoritarian governments can reduce inequality if they wish, and there are plenty of historical instances. But they are more likely to favor concentrating income in the hands their supporters. On theoretical grounds, democracy should be much more conducive to low income inequality.

Key pieces of evidence are supportive. There are three Latin American countries that democratized relatively early and (for the most part) remained democratic: Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay. In the 1980s, the earliest point for which reliable comparative data exist, the level of income inequality in this group was substantially below the Latin American average.

Another six Latin American nations turned democratic in the 1980s. Drawing on earlier research by Edward Muller ("Democracy, Economic Development, and Income Inequality," *American Sociological Review* 53