

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY TUESDAY COLLOQUIUM, 9 APRIL 2024, 3:30-4:30

Abercrombie & Fitch And the Creation of the Outdoor Industry

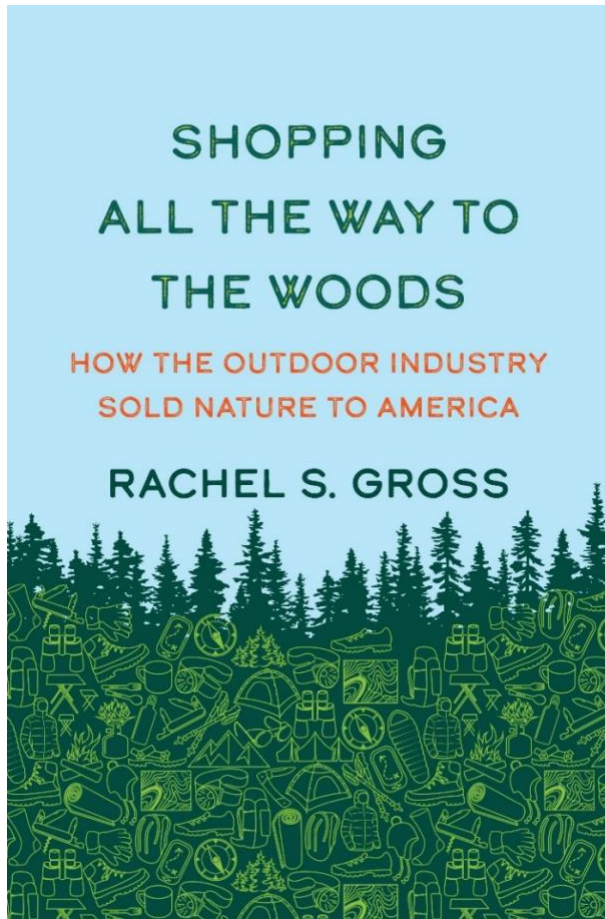
Rachel S. Gross

Ph.D.; Assistant Professor of History, University of Colorado Denver

and a Smithsonian Institution Predoctoral Fellow at NMAH in 2014.

Abstract

The outdoor industry emerged around the turn of the twentieth century and convinced American outdoorspeople to buy rather than make much of what they needed to get back to nature. New outdoor stores sold products such as hunting suits, canoes, and any numbers of gadgets to a growing number of outdoor enthusiasts. Rather than remaining jumping-off points near a trail, new stores opened in big city centers to cater to urbanites long before they arrived at the trailhead. In 1922, visitors to Abercrombie & Fitch, the self-proclaimed “greatest sporting goods store in the world,” would have found themselves at a crossroads between commerce and nature. Outdoor stores brought the experience of the blazed trail—and its sense of human conquest of wild lands—to the urban boulevard that might have otherwise seemed wholly disconnected from nature. These new urban meccas of the outdoors sold an old story: the goods they sold were true necessities for real outdoorsmen, and those products marked not just a path to nature, but nature itself.



[Rachel S. Gross](#) is a historian of the outdoor industry and author of *Shopping All the Way to the Woods: How the Outdoor Industry Sold Nature to America* (Yale University Press, 2024). She is an Assistant Professor of History at the University of Colorado Denver where she teaches U.S. environmental, business, and public history. She was a Lemelson Center Fellow