

ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF NORTH AMERICA

NJIT-Rutgers, Newark: Fall 2005
Graduate Course: History 548-001
Time: Wednesday: 5:00-7:20
Location: Conklin 350

Instructor: Prof. Neil Maher
Federated Department of History NJIT-Rutgers University, Newark

Office Hours:
Wednesdays, 2:00-4:00 PM and by appointment
Room 325, Cullimore Hall (NJIT campus, behind Eberhart “Castle”)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This reading seminar provides an introduction to the field of environmental history. In it we will explore the ever-changing relationship between the nature and culture of the North American continent. We will examine this history through three thematic lenses. First, we will be exploring how the natural environment shaped the patterns of human life in various parts of the continent. Second, we will be tracing the shifting ideologies towards nature held by North Americans during different periods of their nation’s histories. And finally, we will be analyzing how these ideas and human activities regarding nature combined in ways that reshaped the North American landscape. Such an approach, I hope, will help us better understand the transnational history of the North American continent. While we will begin the semester reading several of the so-called environmental history “classics,” the goal of the course is to examine some of the most important themes and innovative scholarship in the field today.

REQUIREMENTS:

Attendance and Class Participation: Class participation should involve active listening and engagement — more than simply showing up, and more than sheer volume of oral output. As graduate students, you should not miss class unless an emergency arises.

Readings: The readings for this course will average one book and one scholarly article per week. While I do not expect you to read every word, you should understand and be comfortable discussing the factual content of the work as well as the author’s argument and his or her use of sources. You should also be able to think critically about the theoretical and interpretative issues raised by the readings. Please try to purchase the books for the class. All but two of the assigned books are now available at NJ Books, which is located at the corner of University and Bleeker streets (the books are not for sale at the Rutgers University bookstore – it’s more expensive). You can purchase the two

remaining books (see below) online at Amazon.com (they have used copies that are cheaper). You should order these two books as soon as possible. Hard copies of the assigned articles are available for photocopying at the reserve desk at Dana Library, or you can find them online via the Dana reserve desk website and print them from home. If NJ Books runs out of copies of assigned books, they have told me they will overnight the book to you free of charge (please let me know if they won't do this for you).

Organizing Class Discussion: Each week one of you will be responsible for leading class discussion of the assigned readings. You should prepare for this leadership role beforehand, and formulate a lesson plan that fosters analytical discussion rather than a mere restatement of the reading material. You will meet with me during office hours on the day you are leading class, to discuss this lesson plan. Areas you might want to focus class discussion on include: the overall argument of the book and article, the “architecture” of the book and whether or not it works, sources used by the authors, and how the readings for that week related to one another and to the other material we examined throughout the semester. I will lead the first two discussions (week two and three) so you can see the type of approach I'm looking for. After week three this responsibility will rotate among the students enrolled in the class. You will also receive a grade and written comments for this assignment.

Book Reviews:

During the course of the semester, you will be asked to write three book reviews. You may choose which books to review from our reading list, and will hand in each review prior to class discussion for that book. These reviews should not simply re-tell the book. Instead they should be analytical, examining issues such as the author's methodology, use of evidence, and argument. These reviews should help jump-start you on your final paper.

Paper Outline: To help organize and conceptualize your final paper (see below), you will also be asked to submit a detailed outline of your project. The outline should include a brief paragraph explaining your argument. The outline is due in class on November 9th (week 10).

Final Research Paper: You will also be asked to write a final paper 10-12 pages in length (please try to keep within these limits). Students may choose between two types of assignments. On the one hand, you may write a historiographical review essay on the state of environmental history scholarship today. Alternatively, you may choose a major theme within environmental history scholarship and examine how various scholars have approached such theme. We will discuss this assignment throughout the semester.

HisTEM Concentration:

While in this M.A. program you must choose a major and minor field of study. The concentration in the History of Technology, Environment and Medicine/Health is unique in its integration of three relatively new historical sub-disciplines. The rapid growth of these three fields in recent years reflects greater awareness among professional historians and the general public of the significance of broader issues concerning technology, the

environment, medicine, and health in contemporary life. As these issues loom larger in the consciousness of society, so does the need to learn more about their historical origins, causes, and patterns of development. The major field in the History of Technology, Environment and Medicine/Health has been specially constructed to meet this growing need. Major: 18 credits (6 classes); Minor: 6 credits (only two classes).

GRADING:

Attendance & Participation:	30%
Organizing Class Discussion:	20%
Book Reviews and Final Research Paper:	50%
Consistent effort and improvement will be weighted heavily in grading.	

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*

Theodore Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*

Brian Donoghue, *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord*
(available new and used online at Amazon.com)

Nancy Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares: The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West*

Kathy Morse, *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush*
(available new and used online at Amazon.com)

Louis Warren, *The Hunters Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America*

Mark Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*

Adam Rome, *Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*

Philip Pauly, *Biologists and the Promise of American Life: From Meriweather Lewis to Alfred Kinsey*

Marguerite Schaffer, *See American First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940*

Gregg Mittman, *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film*

Sylvia Washington, *Packing them In: An Archeology of Environmental Racism, 1865-2005*

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS:

INTRODUCTION

- WEEK 1: WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY?** (September 7)
Required Reading:
None
- WEEK 2: THE BIRTH OF ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY** (September 14)
Required Reading:
Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*
Mart Stewart, "Environmental History: Profile of a Developing Field,"
The History Teacher 31 (May 1998): 350-368.
- WEEK 3: GROWING PAINS** (September 21)
William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*
Theodore Steinberg, "Nature, Agency, and Power in History," *American Historical Review*, 107, no. 3 (June 2002).
- WEEK 4: ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY MATURES** (September 28)
Required Reading:
Theodore Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*
Adam Rome, "What Really Matters: Environmental Perspective on Modern America," *Environmental History* 7 (2002).

PART I: FIELD THEMES

- WEEK 5: AGRICULTURE** (October 5)
Required Reading:
Brian Donoghue, *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord*
Mark Fiege, "The Weedy West: Mobile Nature, Boundaries, and Common Space in the Montana Landscape," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 36, no. 1 (2005)
- WEEK 6: FORESTRY** (October 12)
Required Reading:
Nancy Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares: The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West*
Linda Nash, "The Fruits of Ill-Health: Pesticides and Workers' Bodies in Post-World War II California," *Osiris*, 19 (2004).

- WEEK 7: MINING** (October 19)
Required Reading:
Kathy Morse, *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush*
Gregg Mittman, "Geographies of Hope: Mining the Frontiers of Health in Denver and Beyond, 1870-1965, *Osiris*, 19 (2004): 93-
- WEEK 8: CONSERVATION** (October 26)
Required Reading:
Louis Warren, *The Hunters Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America*
Karl Jacoby, "Class and Environmental History: Lessons from 'The War in the Adirondacks'," *Environmental History*, 2, no. 3 (July 1997): 324-342.
- WEEK 9: PRESERVATION** (November 2)
Mark Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*
William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*
- WEEK10: TECHNOLOGY** (November 9)
Required Reading:
Adam Rome, *Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*
Langdon Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politic?" in *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology*.
- WEEK 11: SCIENCE** (November 16)
Required Reading:
Philip Pauly, *Biologists and the Promise of American Life: From Meriweather Lewis to Alfred Kinsey*
Mitman, Gregg "Hay Fever Holiday: Health, Leisure, and Place in Gilded-Age America" *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 77, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 600-635.

WEEK 12: TOURISM (November 22)

***** TUESDAY MEEETING DUE TO THANKSGIVING**

Required Reading:

Marguerite Schaffer, *See American First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940*

Connie Chung, Novel Tourism: Nature, Industry, and Literature on Monterey's Cannery Row, *Western Historical Quarterly*, 35, no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 309-330.

WEEK 13: POPULAR CULTURE (November 30)

Gregg Mittman, *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film*
Jennifer Price, "Looking for Nature at the Mall," in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*

WEEK 14: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (December 7)

Required Reading:

Sylvia Washington, *Packing them In: An Archeology of Environmental Racism, 1865-2005*

Annie Coleman, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing," *Pacific Historical Review*, (Nov 1996).