

## ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF NORTH AMERICA

NJIT-Rutgers, Newark: Spring 2010  
Undergraduate Course: History 334-H02

Time and Location:  
Mondays 1:00-2:25 and Wednesdays 10:00-11:25  
103 Kupfrian Hall

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

**Office Hours:** Cullimore 325 Hall

Tuesdays, 2:00-4:00  
Wednesdays, 1:00-3:00  
And by appointment

**Contact Information:**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course provides an introduction to the environmental history of North America from colonial times to the present. In it we will explore many of the most important ideas, events, and movements in American history, but do so in new and interesting ways. Rather than focusing solely on the political or economic history of what eventually became the United States — a history that many of you already learned in high school — we will instead examine how the interrelationship between humans and the natural world shaped that history. While I have arranged the course chronologically in an effort to illustrate the importance of this relationship throughout the whole of North America's past, we will be examining 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 understand an important and unexplored aspect of the history of North America. Class meetings will consist of a mixture of lectures, discussion, group readings of primary historic documents, and films clips.

## **REQUIREMENTS:**

**Attendance and Class Participation:** These are not optional. No unexcused absences will be tolerated. This is especially important since 15% of your grade depends on your class participation. Such participation should involve active listening and engagement — more than simply showing up or sheer volume of oral output.

**Readings:** Reading assignments will average 75-100 pages per week, and will consist of three books, a few articles, as well as primary historical documents that we will read and discuss in class. You are expected to have completed the reading assignment BEFORE class, since our discussions may draw directly on the readings for that week. When reading, try not only to understand the factual information being presented, but also think critically about the author's argument. Please try to purchase the books for the class; there are only three and all are available at the NJIT bookstore in the student center in inexpensive paperback editions. There will also be at least one copy of each book at the reserve desk at Van Houten Library (these may not be checked out of the library).

**Short Papers:** Throughout the semester you will be required to write three short papers no longer than four pages in length. The papers will be in response to the three books we are reading during the term. For each assignment I will provide a question beforehand, which you will then go on to answer in your paper. You will be graded on both your ideas and your writing.

**Mid-Term and Final Exams:** This course on the environmental history of North America will include a mid-term and final exam. Both will draw on material from lectures, discussions, films, the assigned readings, and primary historical documents. Each exam will consist of three different types of questions: identification questions in which you will be asked to define a give term, event, or person; short answer questions involving a one or two sentence description of a given concept; and longer essay questions for which you will be expected to use the course materials to make analytical arguments.

### **NJIT Honor Code:**

All Students should be aware that the History Department takes the NJIT Honor code seriously and enforces it strictly. Because of the nature of our assignments, if you plagiarize your papers it will be obvious and I will be forced to report such actions to the Dean.

### **History at NJIT:**

The history department at NJIT has eight full-time faculty members, and is part of the Federated History Department at NJIT—Rutgers University, Newark. Because the department is Federated, NJIT and Rutgers students can take history courses offered at either institution. The NJIT History Department also offers a minor in history. On the graduate level, the Federated Department of History also administers a joint Rutgers—NJIT masters program in history, which offers two joint degrees: the Master of Arts (MA) and the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT). Fields of concentration are available in

American History, World History, and the History of Technology, Environment and Medicine/Health. Application is made to the program at Rutgers-Newark.

**Pre-Law at NJIT:**

The NJIT History Department also administers a new BA program in Law, Technology and Culture that represents the new focal point for pre-law education at NJIT. The new program is specially focused on preparing students at a technological university for careers in law and law-related areas of business and government, as well as providing students with a broadly comparative perspective on the nature of legal thought and practice. Special features of the NJIT program include: an interdisciplinary curriculum focused on law in relation to technology, media, environment, health, and culture; opportunities for exceptionally well-qualified students to matriculate in an accelerated BA/JD program with the Seton Hall School of Law; hands-on internships in law; and a patent law option available to students pursuing careers as patent attorneys or patent examiners. Because this is a highly competitive program, applicants should have records of strong academic performance and SAT composite scores in mathematics and critical reading of at least 1200. The NJIT history department also administers a new minor in Legal Studies.

**GRADING:**

Attendance and Participation:	15%
Short Papers:	45%
Mid-Term and Final Exam	40%
Consistent effort and improvement will be weighted heavily in grading.	

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

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

Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (must be 4<sup>th</sup> edition)

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

**COURSE SCHEDULE:**

**INTRODUCTION**

January 20: **What is Environmental History?**

In-Class Reading:

Front Page, *New York Times*

**PART I: NATIVE AMERICAN-COLONIAL CONTACT**

January 25: **Indian Nature**

Required Reading:

William Cronon, Kennecot Journey: The Paths out of Town, in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Past* in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992): 28-51. (Available for downloading in PDF format on course Moodle website).

January 27: **European Ecological Imperialism**

Required Reading:

Cronon, vii-33

February 1: **Land Becomes Property**

Required Reading:

Cronon, 34-81

## **PART II: NATURE'S NATION**

February 3: **The American Revolution**

Required Reading:

Cronon, 82-107

February 8: **Early Industrialization**

Required Reading:

Cronon, 108-156

February 10: **Discussion: Cronon's *Changes in the Land***

Required Reading:

Cronon, 159-186

February 15: **The South and Slavery**

Required Reading:

Nash, 1-22

February 17: **The Civil War**

Required Reading:

Nash, 23-43

Assignment: First short paper due

## **PART III: TAMING THE "WILD" WEST**

February 22: **"Creating Wilderness"**

Required Reading:

Nash, 44-66

February 24: **The Frontier**  
Required Reading:  
Nash, 66-95

March 1: **From Western Nature to Natural Resources**  
Required Reading:  
Nash, 96-121

March 3: **MID-TERM EXAM**  
No Required Reading:

#### **PART IV: THE ANTI-URBAN TURN**

March 8: **The Rise of Cities**  
Required Reading:  
Nash, 122-140

March 10: **Transcendentalists, Romantics, and Utopians**  
Required Reading:  
Nash, 141-199

March 15: **NO CLASS — SPRING BREAK**  
Required Reading:  
Nash, 200-237

March 17: **NO CLASS — SPRING BREAK**  
Required Reading:  
Nash, 238-315

March 22: **Parks and the Progressive Movement**  
Required Reading:  
Nash, 316-341

March 24: **Discussion: Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind***  
Required Reading:  
Nash, 342-390

March 29: **The Great Wilderness Debate**  
Required Reading: Film Clip: *The Wilderness Idea*  
Worster, 3-25

#### **PART VI: THE AGE OF ECOLOGY**

March 31: **“Natural” Disasters**

Required Reading:  
Worster, 26-63  
Film Clip: *The Plow That Broke the Plains*  
Assignment: Second short paper due

April 5: **New Deal Nature**  
Required Reading:  
Worster, 66-97

April 7: **Beginnings of Biological Balance**  
Required Reading:  
Worster, 100-138

April 12: **Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring***  
Required Reading:  
Worster, 140-163  
Film Clip: *Rachel Carson's Silent Spring*

#### **PART VII: POSTWAR ENVIRONMENTALISM**

April 14: **The American Lawn**  
Required Reading:  
Worster, 164-197

April 19: **Discussion: Worster's *Dust Bowl***  
Required Reading:  
Worster, 198-254

April 21: **1960s Environmentalism**  
Required Reading:  
To be announced

April 26: **Green Politics — the 1970s**  
No Required Reading:  
Assignment: Third short paper due.

April 28: **Review for Final Exam**  
No Required Reading:  
Begin studying for Final Exam

May 3: **Final Exam**