

ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF URBAN AMERICA

NJIT-Rutgers, Newark: Fall 2006
Graduate Course: History 562
Time: Tuesdays, 5:00-7:30
Location: Conklin 324

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

Office Hours:
Tuesdays, 2:00-4:00, Conklin 308 (Rutgers campus)
Thursdays, 1:00-3:00, Cullimore 325 (NJIT campus)

And by appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This reading seminar provides an introduction to the new field of urban environmental history. In it we will explore the ever-changing interrelationship over time between American cities and urban and exurban nature. While I have organized this course thematically, we will examine the environmental history of urban America through three thematic lenses. First, we will analyze how society used nature in a variety of ways to construct cities across the American landscape. Second, we will focus on how these urban areas in turn transformed nature both within cities and beyond their borders, often in unintended and hazardous ways. And finally, we will turn to the various ways urbanites responded to the environmental threats associated with living in an American city. Such a reading will allow us to assess the state of the urban environmental history 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: Because urban environmental history is a relatively young field, the readings for this course represent a new genre of historical scholarship, and will entail on 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 are in cheaper paperback editions. These 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). 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. 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).

Book Reviews:

During the course of the semester, you will be asked to write two 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 urban environmental history scholarship today. Alternatively, you may choose a major theme within urban environmental history literature 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 and Participation: 50%
Written Assignments (including book reviews, outline, and finally paper): 50%

Consistent effort and improvement will be weighted heavily in grading.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1992)
- Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (University of Chicago Press, 2005)
- Bryant Simon, *Boardwalk of Dreams: Atlantic City and the Fate of Urban America* (Oxford University Press, 2004)
- Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (Owl Books, 2000)
- Lizabeth Cohen, *Consumers Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (Vintage, 2003)
- Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2006)
- Delores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: Gender, Housing, and Family Life* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2002)
- Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999)
- Craig Colten, *An Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004)
- Jim Goodman, *Blackout* (North Point Press, 2005)
- Adriana Petryna, *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens after Chernobyl* (Princeton University Press, 2002)
- Owen Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (Oxford, 2005)
- Michael Sorkin, *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (Hill and Wang, 1992)

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS:

INTRODUCTION

- WEEK 1: **INTRODUCTION TO COURSE** (September 5)
Required Reading: In Class
David Owen, "Green Manhattan: Everywhere Should Be More Like New York," *New Yorker* (October 18, 2004), 111-123.
- WEEK 2: **MAKING CITIES** (September 12)
Required Reading:
William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*
Mart Stewart, "Environmental History: Profile of a Developing Field,"
The History Teacher 31 (May 1998): 350-368.
- WEEK 3: **DOWNTOWN** (September 19)
Required Reading:
Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).
Christine Rosen and Joel Tarr, eds., "The Importance of an Urban Perspective in Environmental History," *Journal of Urban History*, 20:3 (1994): 299-310.
- WEEK 4: **TOURISM** (September 26)
Required Reading:
Tourism: Bryant Simon, *Boardwalk of Dreams: Atlantic City and the Fate of Urban America* (Oxford University Press, 2004)
Greg Mittman, "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 5: **POLLUTION** (October 3)
Required Reading:
Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (Owl Books, 2000)
Adam Rome, "Coming to Terms with Pollution: The Language of Environmental Reform, 1865-1915," *Environmental History*, 1: 3 (1996).

- WEEK 6: **CONSUMPTION** (October 10)
Required Reading:
 Consumption: Lizabeth Cohen, *Consumers Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (Vintage, 2003)
 Jennifer Price, "Looking for Nature at the Mall," in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*
- WEEK 7: **RACE** (October 17)
Required Reading:
 Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2006)
 Hurley, Andrew, "The Social Biases of Environmental Change in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980." *Environmental Review* 12 (Winter, 1988): 1-20
- WEEK 8: **GENDER** (October 24)
 Delores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: Gender, Housing, and Family Life* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2002)
 Douglas Sackman, "Putting Gender on the Table: Food and the Family Life of Nature," in Virginia Scharff, ed., *Seeing Nature Through Gender*, 169-193.
- WEEK 9: **PLANNING** (October 31)
Required Reading:
 Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999)
 Jennifer Price, "Thirteen Ways off Seeing Nature In L.A.: A Few New Methods for the Old Practice of Using Los Angeles to Think," Parts I and II, in *The Believer*, April 2006.
- WEEK 10: **"NATURAL" DISASTERS** (November 7)
Required Reading:
 "Natural" Disasters: Craig Colten, *An Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004)
 Ari Kelman, "City of Nature: New Orleans' Blessing; New Orleans' Curse," *Slate* (August 31, 2005): 1-2.

- WEEK 11: **UNNATURAL DISASTERS** (November 14)
Required Reading:
Jim Goodman, *Blackout* (North Point Press, 2005)
Mark Tebeau, "Scaling New Heights: Heroic Firemen, Gender, and the Urban Environment, 1875-1900," in Virginia Scharff, ed., *Seeing Nature Through Gender*, 63-79.
- WEEK 12: **URBAN HEALTH** (November 21)
Required Reading:
Adriana Petryna, *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens after Chernobyl*
Julie Livingston, "Insights from an African History of Disability," *Radical History Review*, 94 (Winter 2006): 111-126.
- WEEK 13: **TRANSPORTATION** (November 28)
Required Reading:
Owen Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (Oxford, 2005)
Shane Hamilton, "Cold Capitalism: The Political Ecology of Frozen Concentrated Orange Juice," *Agricultural History* 77 (Fall 2003).
- Assignment: Paper Outlines Due
- WEEK 14: **PUBLIC SPACE** (December 5)
Required Reading:
Public Space: Michael Sorkin, *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (Hill and Wang, 1992)
- WEEK 15: **FINAL PAPER WORKSHOP** (December 12)