

HSTAA 421
American Environmental History
Summer 2002

CMU 120
11:00-1:00 M-F

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Course description and goals

Environmental history is the study of the reciprocal relationships between humans and their physical environments over time. This class will examine those connections in and around three different kinds of places in the nineteenth and twentieth century United States: parks, cities, and rivers. Some big questions will recur in each unit. Who speaks for and defines "nature?" What are the connections between environmental decisions and social inequities? How have interactions with the natural world shaped the institutions – scientific, economic, political -- we think of as quintessentially modern? Some background in American history is helpful, but not required for the class.

This course has three main goals. The first is to introduce you to the nonhuman world as an important and complicated part of American history. The second is to sharpen your analytical skills, both written and oral. Reading, thinking, writing, and talking about a wide variety of primary and secondary sources are vital parts of this course. The third is to give you the tools to figure out how history has shaped the places where we live and the environmental issues we face in our daily lives.

Readings

The following books are required and available at the University Bookstore:

Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980*
Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*
Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life*
Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River*

The course reader is also required and can be purchased at Ave Copy (41st and University Way, west side of the Ave.). The books and reader are also available on reserve at Odegaard Library. Also, I will frequently distribute short primary source readings in class for group discussion. The reading for this class, as you would expect for an upper-level, intensive course, is substantial.

Assignments and grading

Short papers (3)	30% (10% each)	Due by August 2, August 13, August 22
Long paper	25%	Topic statement due by August 8 Drafts (optional) due by August 14 Final draft due August 20
Final exam	25%	August 23, in class
Class participation	20%	

Short papers

These papers will be **between 250 and 500 words (1-2 pages)**. They will be short analyses of one night's reading, based on your choice of discussion questions I will distribute ahead of time. You need to write one short paper for each unit, but you may write on any night's reading, so long as you turn in your paper *before* we discuss that reading. These assignments are designed to give you practice reading closely and untangling arguments. They should also help you participate in class discussions. They are not journals or response papers. I hope you do have strong reactions to these readings, but I want those reactions to be channeled into strong (and short!) analytical essays.

Long paper

This paper will be **between 1250 and 1750 words (5-7 pages)**. You have a choice of writing a comparative book review; an analysis of a specific landscape or other artifact; or a curriculum project. I will distribute a more detailed assignment during the second week of the course. A statement of your topic is due by August 8. I will be happy to comment on and discuss drafts through August 14.

Final exam

The final exam will be in class on August 23.

Class participation

We will spend a lot of time discussing the readings and other materials in this class. **Doing the reading, thinking about it, and coming to class ready to engage in lively, courteous discussion is the best way to do well in this part of the course.** I will distribute more specific guidelines for class participation for some activities (role plays, group work, and debates, for example). The first prerequisite, of course, for a good class participation grade is attendance. I can't grade your participation if you aren't here.

And finally...

Late work will automatically lower your grade on an assignment .3 per day. I will not accept computer-related excuses. If you absolutely have to have an extension, you need to contact me, preferably by e-mail or in person, ahead of time. Because the critical essay is due so close to the final exam, I do not recommend asking for an extension on it unless you are faced with an emergency.

Schedule and readings

July 25 Introduction
Environmental history in U.S. history

- William Cronon, "Kennecott Journey: The Paths out of Town," from Cronon, George Miles, Jay Gitlin, *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, (New York, 1992), 28-51
- Charles C. Mann, "1491," *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 2002
- "The Pristine Myth," (interview with Charles C. Mann) *Atlantic Unbound*, 7 March 2002

July 26 Market revolutions and changes in the land

- Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, pp. 3-70
- George Perkins Marsh, *Man and Nature*, ed. David Lowenthal (Boston, 1965 [1864]), 7-13, 18-21, 35-41
- Henry David Thoreau, "Ktaadn," from *The Maine Woods*, (New York, 1950), 261-279

July 29 Nationalism, landscapes, and culture in the antebellum United States

- Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, pp. 71-100
- Jennifer Price, "When Women Were Women, Men Were Men, And Birds Were Hats," from *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (New York, 1999)

July 30 Preserving and conserving Progressive animals: bison

- Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, pp. 83-139
- Aldo Leopold, "Good Oak," "Thinking Like a Mountain," "Wildlife in American Culture," from *Sand County Almanac* (New York, 1949)

July 31 Conservation and leisure in the interwar years

- Gregg Mitmann, "When Nature Is the Zoo: Vision and Power in the Art and Science of Natural History," *Osiris* 11 (1996), 117-143

August 1 Ecology and environmentalism

- Susan Davis, "Touch the Magic," in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York, 1995), 204-217

August 2 Last day to turn in short paper #1
Battles for wilderness

- Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs*, 1-87
- William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, (New York, 1991), 207-259

August 5 Making modern nature: cities and commodities

- Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*, 91-159, 171-182

August 6 Health, wealth, and waste: Progressive cities

- Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*, 183-233
- Andrew Hurley, "Creating Ecological Wastelands: Oil Pollution in New York City, 1870-1900," *Journal of Urban History* 20 (1994), 340-64

August 7 Defining pollution: Progressive cities, cont.

- "Parks, Playgrounds, and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region," in Greg Hise and Bill Deverell, eds., *Eden by Design: The 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region*

August 8 **Statement of topic for long paper due**
The rise of planning

- Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York, 1999), 95-147

August 9 Driving home to nature: postwar suburbanization

- Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities*, 1-135
- Rachel Carson, "A Fable for Tomorrow," "The Obligation to Endure," "Elixirs of Death," "The Other Road," from *Silent Spring* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1962)

August 12 Cities and environmentalism?

- Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities*, 136-182
- Richard White, "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," in *Uncommon Ground*

August 13 **Last day to turn in short paper #2**
Climbing walls and waterfalls: urban recreational nature

- Richard White, *The Organic Machine*, 3-48

August 14 **Last day to turn in drafts of long paper**
Nature incorporated: rivers and power

- Wallace Stegner, ed., John Wesley Powell, *Report on the Lands of the Arid Regions of the United States* (Cambridge, 1962 [1879]), excerpts
- Donald Worster, "Hydraulic Society in California," from *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West*, (New York, 1992) 53-64

August 15 Rivers of empire: reclamation

- *Organic Machine*, 48-81

August 16 Irrigated Edens

- Char Miller, ed., *Water in the West: A High Country News Reader* (Corvallis, 2001), 80-92
- *Organic Machine*, 81-113

August 19 Rivers and power, cont.

August 20 **Long paper due**
Fish fights

- William deBuys, *Salt Dreams: Land and Water in Low-Down California* (Albuquerque, 1999), 97-121, 205-258

August 21 Collecting consequences: rivers and waste

- John McPhee, "Farewell to the Nineteenth Century," *New Yorker*, 27 September 1999
- *Water in the West*, 110-122, 278-305

August 22 **Last day to turn in short paper #3**
Restoration?

August 23 **Final exam (in class)**