

Introduction to U.S. Environmental History

History 280
 Fall Semester, 2010
 Instructor: Kelly Roark
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 Office Hours: Tuesday,
 1:00—3:00pm
 and by appointment



Course Overview:

The study of history helps us to not only better understand the people and places of the past but also to better understand ourselves.

Historians use a range of evidence and skills to understand the people of the past on their own terms. We will ask how peoples' choices long ago shape the world we live in today. How did things come to be the way they are? What are the historical roots of our cultural beliefs and values? Historians often approach these questions by telling stories about people. The natural world, however, has played an important role in shaping the world we inhabit today. The primary goal of this course is to explore the links between human history and natural history.

This course is an introduction to the field of environmental history. We will move chronologically and topically through important periods and issues in the emerging field of environmental history. This course is not a comprehensive study of the field or U.S. history; neither is it a history of the environmental movement. Broadly, environmental history examines the relationship between people and the natural world and how that relationship has changed over time. Geographically, this course focuses largely on the area now bounded by the continental United States. Some topics extend into modern day Canada and Mexico, while others are global. As we will see, one of the interesting things about the study of environmental history is its ability to bring seemingly distant places into its stories. Chronologically, this course spans a large range of time, from colonial America to the emergence of the modern environmental movement. We will focus on the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Course Prerequisites:

This course is an introductory survey. It does not require previous coursework in history, environmental studies, geography, or environmental science. It assumes a basic knowledge of United States history. Your instructor assumes you bring college-level reading, writing, and speaking skills with you to the course. Please consult the Tutoring and Learning Center (715-346-3568) for help with writing and study skills. Please talk to me if you feel overwhelmed or confused, and consider taking one of the tutorials at the Learning Center: “writing papers,” “understanding difficult readings,” “taking lecture notes,” or “developing good study habits.” <http://www.uwsp.edu/tlc/>

Course Goals:

This course will cover many issues surrounding the way people and place, human and non-human nature, have interacted over the course of North American history. We intend that this course will give you the tools to think critically and creatively about the past, about your world, and about your place in it. This class, then, should help you to:

- 1) communicate your ideas. Both through written work and through classroom discussions, history classes like this one intend to develop your critical thinking skills. We will emphasize developing arguments and presenting evidence to support those arguments.
- 2) understand that ideas about nature are shaped by history and culture. The course will help you to become more aware and critical of your own assumptions about the natural world. We will also discuss the historical roots of some current environmental debates.
- 3) think about your community and your place in the world. We hope this course will give you some of the tools to think about where you are from and the relationship that you and your community have with other places.



Computer Requirements: Online components of the course will be accessible through Desire2Learn, the online software management system licensed for use by UWSP. To access the site, go to <https://uwsp.courses.wisconsin.edu/>. From here, you can login using your normal user ID and password. You will then be directed to the D2L homepage, where you can click on History 280 to enter the course. Those students who have difficulty logging in from home may use the university's computer labs in order to complete all online assignments and reading. I will also post potential discussion questions, reading guides, short assignments, and other information on D2L and through our class e-mail list. Please check these frequently.

Conduct in Class: Please be respectful to your classmates and the instructor during lectures and discussion. Especially in class, please refrain from talking, texting, reading newspapers, leaving early, or any other disruptive behavior. Also, please be sure that cell phones are turned off. For further information on UWSP's policies regarding student rights and responsibilities, see <http://www.uwsp.edu/admin/stuaffairs/rights/rightsChap14.pdf>.

Additional Notes

- ⊕ Any student who needs special accommodations in order to meet any of the requirements of this course should speak to me as soon as possible or contact the Disability Services Office, 103 Student Services Center, Voice: (715) 346-3365, TTY: (715) 346-3362, <http://www.uwsp.edu/special/disability/>
- ⊕ I will work with you and the Disability Services Office to make all reasonable accommodations to ensure you find success in this class. Please do not hesitate to talk to me.
- ⊕ **ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:** Any instance of academic misconduct such as plagiarism or cheating will be pursued fully and aggressively. Representing the ideas, thoughts, or work of others as your own (even if the exact wording has been changed) is academic misconduct. Please consult your student handbook or see the University of Wisconsin Standards for Academic Misconduct: <http://www.uwsp.edu/admin/stuaffairs/rights/rightsChap14.pdf>

--This syllabus remains subject to change throughout the semester.--

Course Assignments:

Each week includes reading, short research tasks, or critical thinking assignments. Please come to class each week prepared to discuss the readings and/or turn in written assignments.

You will often have short written assignments due in class. Some of these are noted in the syllabus others will be announced in class. Specific instructions will be discussed in class. Reading quizzes and response papers will be unannounced, so be prepared.

This course also includes one mid-term exam, one final exam, and one final research paper.

Place Paper:

Your final paper for this course is a 5 page (maximum) research paper. Your paper should focus on a particular place and should be a brief environmental history of that place. It should accomplish the following things: provide an explanation of the characteristics of your chosen place, describe the relationship between people and the place, and – most importantly – show how that relationship has changed over time. Your paper must have a clear thesis statement, a logical structure, and it must engage both primary and secondary sources. You will receive more information about the paper in class. Please come talk to me during office hours and consult with the librarians at the Reference Desk and Archives.

Grade Summary:

Participation, Preparedness, and Discussions = 10%

Short Written Assignments = 20%

Mid-Term Exam = 25%

Final Place Paper = 25%

Final Exam = 20%

Grading is more of an art than a science, but you have a reasonable expectation to understand the grading scheme of the course. Some flexibility is built into the grading scale and is designed to *benefit you*—particularly if you demonstrate significant improvement over the course of the semester and make thoughtful contributions to the class.

A (95-100): demonstrates excellent command of historical knowledge (ideas, names, places, dates, etc.) and an informed, thoughtful interpretation of that information

A- (90-94.9): demonstrates strong command of historical knowledge and interpretation

B+ (86-89.9)

B (82-85.9): demonstrates a good command of historical knowledge and some interpretation of that information; demonstrates significant preparation and thoughtful study

B- (79-81.9)

C+ (76-78.9)

C (72-75.9): demonstrates a minimal command of historical knowledge; demonstrates minimal preparation for assigned tasks

C- (69-71.9)

D+ (66-68.9)

D (62-65.9): demonstrates inaccurate historical knowledge, a general lack of information, or little preparation

D- (60-61.9)

F (60 or less): fails to answer the correct question or/and demonstrates little preparation for assigned tasks or very little analysis

Readings:

Many readings will be available on-line. Your required texts are available at the bookstore or through text rental, however, you may be able to purchase them on-line at significantly lower cost.

Louis S. Warren, *American Environmental History* (Available through Text Rental)

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land* (Purchase)

Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (Purchase)

Other readings will be available through Desire2Learn, E-Reserves, usually noted by week.

Course Outline:

September 2

Week 1: Definitions, Getting Started

Assignment for next week: “Where I’m From” Poem [see handout] (Due Tuesday, September 7th in class; bring 2 copies; one for me and one to share with others)

Reading for THIS week: Warren, pages 1-3 and read this syllabus.

September 7-9

Week 2: The Pristine Myth and Ecological Imperialism

Reading: *The Ecological Indian* [Available on-line at our D2L/E-Reserve course web page];

Warning: Heavy reading for the next few weeks – read the chapters assigned from *Changes in the Land* and *Flight Maps* at your own pace, but you might want to get an early start.

Turn in two copies of your “Where I’m From” poem in class on September 7th.

September 14 - 16

Week 3: Early American Environments and Nature in Colonial America

Reading: William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, pages 1-33; 54-81

September 21 and 23

Week 4: The Grid in the Country

Assignment: Due at the beginning of class Tuesday, September 21st. Write a one-page (typed, double-spaced) response to one of the discussion questions handed out last week (you can also access the questions through D2L under Week 4).

Reading: William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 127-170.

FIELD TRIP and CAMPUS TOUR (Dates will be announced in class; please come prepared for the weather and a short tour of campus).

September 28th and 30th

Week 5: Envisioning Nature and Then Eating It; Consuming Nature

Reading: Jennifer Price’s *Flight Maps*, pp. xv-109.

Discussion Focus for Wednesday: *Flight Maps, Chapters 1 and 2 (Missed Connections: The Passenger Pigeon Extinction and When Women were Women, Men were Men, and Birds were Hats)*

October 5th and 7th

Week 6: The City and the Country: Extractive Industries, Transportation, and Romantics

Reading: Excerpts on D2L

Assignment: Bring in an idea for your final paper to class on Thursday; one or two paragraphs. List at least two sources you intend to use to write your paper. These sources must not contain “en.wikipedia.org” or similar – wink, wink.

October 12th and 14th

Week 7: The American Ways of Hunting and Dying

Reading: Louis Warren, *The Hunter's Game* on D2L

October 19th and 21st

Week 8: Urban Environmental History: Class and Trash

What Smells?: The History of Trash in the United States

No Additional Reading this week; Study for exam

Wednesday, October 21st **MIDTERM EXAM**

October 26th and 28th

Week 9: National Parks and Conservation Controversies

Reading: Warren, Documents, (bottom of 236- 243)

Conservation, Preservation and Hetch Hetchy (Primary Documents from Stradling, *Conservation in the Progressive Era* on D2L)

Edward Abbey, excerpt from *Desert Solitaire*, “Polemic: Industrial Tourism and the National Parks” (on D2L)

November 2nd and 4th

Week 10: Environmental Devastation and Reclamation:

Considering the Role of the Federal Government and Environmental Disaster

Reading: D2L Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl*

November 9th and 11th

Week 11: Problems and Solutions

Readings: Aldo Leopold, excerpt from *A Sand County Almanac*, (on D2L)

William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness” in Warren pages, 212-236.

Assignment: **Final Paper Outline** due in class November 11th

November 16th and 18th

Week 12: Our Greatest Fears: What Science Fiction Tells Us about Ourselves

Reading: Warren, pages 244-55; 263-270

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* excerpt

Film: *Rachel Carson and Silent Spring*

November 23 (No Class Thursday, November 25th)

Week 13: Writing and Research Week

No reading for this week: Focus on your Place Papers. Research and Writing.

PLACE PAPERS DUE Tuesday, November 23rd by Midnight [Remember to submit papers to our Drop Box on D2L]

November 30th and December 2nd

Week 14: Energy Crisis, Social Crisis, Political Crisis: The Expanding Circle of Environmental Politics

Reading, Warren 245 – top of 263; and

Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps*, “A Brief Natural History of the Pink Flamingo,” pages 111-166.

December 7th and 9th

Week 15: Environmental Racism, Environmental Justice

Reading: In Warren, pages 318-322 “Environmental Racism and Biased Methods of Risk Assessment” (Commissioned by the United Church of Christ); and

Reading: *The Death of Environmentalism* on D2L.

Assignment: Look back over the class syllabus. Think of a song that you believe would best illustrate one of the important topics or themes of the class. Turn in a song title, artist/performer and some of the most relevant lyrics and the theme or topic they represent. Due at the beginning of class, December 7th.

No Class December 14th; catch up on readings and prepare for the final exam; Extended office hours.

FINAL EXAM = Friday, December 17th 17:00-19:00

