GEO 354
American Environmental History and Geography

Fall 2009

Mondays and Wednesdays,
3:45-5:05pm
School of Management 004

Professor: Bob Wilson
Email: rmwilson@maxwell.syr.edu
Office: Eggers 533 (5th floor; take the elevator)
Telephone: 443.9433
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:30-3:30pm or by appointment.

Overview
How did Americans use energy in previous centuries and what sort of environmental problems accompanied different energy sources? Why did Americans once revile predators such as wolves and grizzly bears but now they celebrate them? How did Americans try to protect or conserve wildlife, forests, and rivers a century ago? Fifty years ago? Today? And could any of this historical knowledge help us understand ‘natural’ disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and massive environmental problems like global warming?

These are just some of the questions we will address in American Environmental History and Geography. This course will help you understand the role of nature in America’s past: how we altered the land and waters and how those changes, in turn, affected society. This not a class primarily about environmentalism (a social movement aimed at protecting and conserving nature). Rather, it is a course that examines the relationship between people and the environment through time and attempts to show how people perceived nature in the past. That being said, during the course we will look at the development of environmentalism and earlier movements such as progressive conservation.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this course, you will be able to

- Identify the key processes through which Americans have transformed the environment.
- Understand the role of nature—both as a physical entity and as an idea—in American culture at various points in the past.
- Critically analyze texts and write more graceful, compelling, and incisive essays.
- Explain key concepts in environmental history and environmental geography more generally.

Evaluation
10% Class Attendance and Participation
20% Reading Notes
20% First Exam
20% Second Exam
30% Place Paper or Research Paper
Class Participation
Attending lectures and participating in class discussions are essential aspects of this course. To give you a sense of my expectations for class participation, I offer the following guidelines:

The A student reads all the material beforehand and demonstrates a clear understanding of the key aspects of the text. She is able to answer questions posed by the professor, but more importantly, she has developed her own questions and comments about the text. She speaks regularly without dominating the discussion. She also listens carefully to what her classmates say and builds on their contributions.

The B student more or less reads the material, though not very carefully. He understands the ‘gist’ of the article or chapter, but when pressed, he has difficulty assessing the implications of the text. He is an infrequent contributor to discussion. In general, this student participates from time to time, but is mostly content to let others do most of the talking and critical thinking.

The C demonstrates little evidence of doing the reading and she rarely, if ever, speaks. However, she attends regularly.

The D or F student misses classes and never talks. Basically, this student is a pain-in-the-behind.

Reading Journal
You are all required to keep a reading journal. Each entry should be no more than two typed, double-spaced pages with one-inch margins consisting of the following:

1) A list of the reading(s) on which it comments. The author’s name and a pre-colon title are sufficient (e.g., Ted Steinberg, “Down to Earth”).

2) A brief, paragraph-long summary of the main argument for that day’s reading(s).

3) Several paragraphs that synthesize and analyze that day’s reading(s) relating them to one another (if relevant) as well as previous readings, discussions, and lectures.

4) Two open-ended questions to help spark class discussion. Avoid simple yes/no or fact questions. (e.g., What year was Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring published?)

Your journal entry should be completed before the class in which we discuss the reading. Generally, this will be Wednesday of each week, but on a few occasions it will be on Monday. The due date is noted for each week on the syllabus with the notation <<RJ Due>>.

There are ten of these due dates noted on the syllabus You must do 2 out of the 10. This gives you some ‘freebie’ weeks where you do not need to write an entry. However, you are still responsible for doing the readings. I am assessing you each week on participation. I suggest you save your ‘freebie’ weeks for the last half of the semester.

This exercise is designed to encourage you to carefully read the assigned books, chapter, and articles. By this point in your academic career, you are now doubt adept at skimming material and getting a general sense of what it is about. Keeping a reading journal will push you to read more deeply, and with luck, give you a greater understanding of the material so you can participate better in class discussion. I will grade these entries primarily on content, not grammar, though this is no excuse to write sloppy sentences and paragraphs.
Exams
There will be two exams, each worth 20% of your final grade. They will cover all the material associated with the course: lectures, readings, films, and discussions. Format will likely include some mixture of key terms, short answers, and an essay.

Place Paper
During the course you will learn about environmental history and read works by people who practice it. In this assignment, you will do environmental history by examining the intertwined history of humans and nature in a particular place. Later in September, I will distribute a very detailed handout that describes this assignment in detail. Due date: Monday, December 7th at the beginning of class.

Academic Integrity
Cheating in any form will not be tolerated, nor is assisting someone to cheat. The submission of any work in this class is taken as a guarantee that the thoughts and expressions are the student’s own unless properly cited. Breaking this policy on exams, essays, or other assignments will, at a minimum, result in a failing grade for an assignment and likely a failing grade for the course. For more information, see the student section of the university’s web site about academic integrity (http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/).

This is what the university obliges me to tell you. This is my own simple take on the matter: plagiarize a paper or cheat on an exam and you will fail. Period. Other professors may let issues of academic dishonesty slide or let you off with a warning. I am not one of those professors.

Student Athletes
Some of you are student athletes. Athletics is an important part your time in college, and I will do my best to accommodate your travel schedules.

Typically, your coaches or another official associated with the team or athletic department will give you a letter explaining your status and a list of your away games. Once you receive this material, make sure to give me a copy. We can then discuss how you can make-up missed lectures and assignments in a timely fashion.

Students with Disabilities
If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), http://disabilityservices.syr.edu, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

H1N1 Virus (aka ‘swine flu’)
Many of you have heard about the H1N1 flu virus, commonly known as swine flu. This strain of the virus first appeared in the United States last spring. At that time, H1N1 infected relatively few Americans, but this fall the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention believes it is possible for a large percentage of people to become infected. People under the age of twenty-four (which includes most of you in this class) are especially vulnerable.

In most cases, those who contract the illness have symptoms similar to the ones caused by the normal seasonal flu with which you are all familiar. However, this strain appears much easier to transmit than other flu viruses. Because of this, if you have flu symptoms such as a fever (above 100 degrees F.) or the chills, do not come to class. Remain away from class until you are 24-hours without a fever. Contact me
via email or phone to let me know you are ill. We can arrange for you to get material missed in lectures and to make-up missed assignments.

Readings

and

GEO 354 Course Reader/Packet
- This is available at The Copy Center in the Marshall Square Mall (Reader #20093-1018)

Course Schedule
(CR) – Course Reader

**Week One**  
**What is Environmental History?**

Mon. 8/31 Introduction: Geography, Nature, and History

Wed., 9/2 What is Environmental History?

Readings
- if you haven’t bought your course reader yet, you can find this article in e-journals and print it out via the SU Library web site. If you don’t know how to find articles in e-journals, contact a librarian at Bird Library for assistance. **You must read and bring this article to Wednesday’s class. No excuses!**
- Also, you must complete an abbreviated reading journal entry for this article that includes one paragraph summarizing the argument, one paragraph summarizing the key points made in the text, and one question about the reading to share with the class.

**Week Two**  
**Facing East from Indian Country**

Mon., 9/7 **Labor Day. No Class**


Readings
**Week Three**
Mon., 9/14  The Ravages of Disease
Wed., 9/16  Columbian Exchange and Ecological Imperialism
<<RJ Due>>
Discussion of Creatures of Empire

Readings
Anderson, Creatures of Empire, 1-71.

**Week Four**  **Transforming the Land**
Mon., 9/21  **No Class. Eid ul-Fitr**
Wed., 9/23  A World of Fields and Fences
<< RJ Due >>
Discussion of Creatures of Empire.

Readings
Anderson, Creatures of Empire, 73-105, 173-246.

**Week Five**  **Nature and Nation in Antebellum America**
Mon., 9/28  **No Class. Yom Kippur**
Wed., 9/30  Industrializing America: Factories, Canals, and Railroads
<< RJ Due >>
Discussion of Nye, Consuming Power.

Readings
Nye, Consuming Power, 1-12, 43-68.

**Week Six**  **War and the Greater Reconstruction**
Mon., 10/5  Civil War/Environmental History of Modern Warfare
<<RJ Due>>
Discussion of Civil War related readings.
Wed., 10/7  The West

Readings
**These readings must be done by Monday.**

**Week Seven**
Mon., 10/12  **Mid-Term Exam**
Wed., 10/14  Video: to be announced.
Readings
None. Study for the exam.

**Week Eight**  **Effluent America**
Mon., 10/19  Smoke and Sewage: Creating the Sanitary City

Wed., 10/21  City Beautiful: Parks and Promenades
<<RJ Due>>
Discussion of Price and Klingle’s essays.

Readings


**Week Nine**  **Resources**
Mon., 10/26  The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number
<<RJ Due>>
Discussion about progressive conservation.

Wed., 10/28  Electrifying the Metropolis and Mining Modernity’s Ore

Readings

**Week Ten**  **Managing Nature**
Mon., 11/2  Forests, Fish, and Wildlife
<<RJ Due>>
Discussion of Smokey the Bear readings.

Wed., 11/4  Water and the West

Readings
**Read this piece by on Smokey the Bear by Monday.**
Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 1-138. **Begin reading the book this week. Don’t wait until next week to start it!**

**Week Eleven**  **Nature’s New Deal**
Mon., 11/9  Dust Bowl, Soils, and the CCC
Video Clips: *The River* (1937)

Wed., 11/11  Discussion of *Dust Bowl*
<<RJ due>>
Video Clips: *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936)

Readings
Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 139-243.
Week Twelve  War and Nature
Mon., 11/16  Second World War and its Aftermath

Wed., 11/18  Fallout: Atomic Legacies and Toxic Trouble
<<RJ Due>>
Discussion of Carson’s impact and legacy.

Readings
Rachel Carson, “I. A Fable for Tomorrow” and “II. The Obligation to
Maril Hazlett, "Voices from the Spring: Silent Spring and the Ecological Turn in American Health," in
Seeing Nature through Gender, edited by Virginia Scharff, (Lawrence: University Press of
Kansas, 2003), 103-128. (CR)

Week Thirteen  Ecological Bodies: Rachel Carson and Silent Spring

Wed., 11/25  ** No Class. Thanksgiving Break**

Week Fourteen  The Environmental Era
Mon., 11/30  Environmentalism Triumphant

Wed., 12/2  Suburbs & Energy Woes

Readings
Nye, Consuming Energies, 227-264.

Week Fifteen  Backlash: Mainstream Environmentalism on the Defensive
Mon., 12/7  **Place Paper due**

Wed., 12/9  Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Global Warming and Hurricane Katrina

Readings
** I will distribute the readings to you in class or via email.

Week Sixteen  The Lessons of Environmental History
Mon., 12/14  **Final Exam: Thursday, December 17th, 7:15-9:15pm**