

GEO 354/HST 384
American Environmental History
and Geography

Fall 2016

Tuesdays and Thursdays,
 12:30-1:50pm
 Sims 237

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Office Hours: Friday, 1:00-2:30pm
 Or by appointment

Overview

How did Americans use energy in previous centuries and what sort of environmental problems accompanied different energy sources? 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 Superstorm Sandy and massive environmental challenges such as climate change?

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 is 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 how people perceived nature in the past. That being said, during the course we will look at the development of environmentalism and earlier reform movements such as progressive conservation.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to do the following:

- 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 society at various points in the past.
- Critically analyze texts and write more graceful, compelling, and incisive prose.
- Explain key concepts in environmental history and environmental geography more generally.

Grades

Participation/Attendance/

| | | | |
|--------------------|-------|------------|------------|
| Quizzes | 15% | A (95-100) | C (73-76) |
| Reading Analyses | 25% | A- (90-94) | C- (70-72) |
| Take-home mid-term | 30% | B+ (87-89) | D (60-69) |
| Take-home final | 30% | B (83-86) | F (0-50) |
| | _____ | B- (80-82) | |
| | 100% | C+ (77-79) | |

Class Attendance, Participation, and Quizzes

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 or reading it closely. She may speak occasionally, but her contribution does not demonstrate much careful thinking about the material. However, she attends regularly.

The **D** or **F** student misses classes and never speaks. He or she may not even bother to bring the readings to class. Basically, this student is a pain-in-the-behind. ☹

You *must* bring your readings to class. Failure to bring readings to class will result in low attendance/participation grade.

** I reserve the right to give pop reading quizzes throughout the course, especially if students are not doing the assigned readings or reading chapters/articles superficially. You don’t like taking pop quizzes. I certainly don’t like grading them. So, complete the readings and we will all be happier. ☺

Reading Analyses

You are all required to complete five analyses of course readings. *At the end of the syllabus, I explain how to write these analyses.*

Exams

There will be two take-home exams, a mid-term and a final. They will cover *all* the material associated with the course: lectures, readings, films, and discussions. I will discuss the format of these exams later in the course

Student Athletes

Some of you are student athletes. Athletics is an important part your time in college. 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. After receiving this documentation, 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), disabilityservices.syr.edu, located at 804 University Avenue, room 309, 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 “Accommodation Authorization Letters” to students as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. My goal is to create a learning environments that are useable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment or achievement, I invite any student to meet with me to discuss additional strategies beyond accommodations that may be helpful to your success.

Religious Observances

SU’s religious observances policy, found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance *provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes*. An online notification process is available through MySlice/Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances from the first day of class until the end of the second week 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.

Laptops, Tablets, and Smart Phones

You may use a laptop or table in class, although I would prefer you not use it on the day we discuss readings. For those who do use laptops, no emailing, web surfing, or Tweeting/Facebooking/Instagraming/Snapchatting (not sure those are all verbs...). It’s painfully obvious when you’re doing this—especially in a class of only twenty to thirty students. Breaking this rule will lead to major deductions in your class participation grade. If it becomes a persistent problem, you will lose your laptop privileges and get a 0% for class participation.

Texting of any sort is not allowed.

Readings

Fiege, Mark. *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012.

Worster, Donald. *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. (**Get the 25th anniversary reprint, published in 2004).

Course Schedule

(BB) – reading available on Blackboard

<<RA Due>> - reading analysis due

Week One

Tues. 8/30 Introduction

Thur. 9/1 Defining Environmental History: Thinking Historically and Geographically

<< RA Due >>

Readings

William Cronon, "Kennecott Journey: The Paths out of Town," in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, ed. William Cronon, George Miles and Jay Gitlin (New York W. W. Norton & Co, 1992), 28-51. (BB)

Fiege, "Land of Lincoln," *Republic of Nature*, 3-22.

** The reading analysis is *only* about Cronon's "Kennecott Journey," *not* Fiege's "Land of Lincoln." But you need to also read "Land of Lincoln" in some detail for Thursday's class.

Week Two

Tues 9/6 Society and Environment in the Early Modern World (~1500-1800)

Thur. 9/8 Pleistocene Extinctions and Native Worlds

Readings

William M. Denevan, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, 3 (1992). (BB)

Thomas R. Vale, "The Pre-European Landscape of the United States: Pristine or Humanized?" in *Fire, Native Peoples, and the Natural Landscape*, ed. Thomas R. Vale (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2002), 1-39. (BB)

Week Three

Tues 9/13 Columbian Exchange and Ecological Imperialism

<<RA Due>>

Readings

Alfred W. Crosby, "Ecological Imperialism: The Overseas Migration of Western Europeans as a Biological Phenomenon," in *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*, ed. Donald Worster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 103-17. (BB)

Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Politics of Grass: European Expansion, Ecological Change, and Indigenous Power in the Southwest Borderlands," *William & Mary Quarterly* 67, 2 (April 2010): 174-208. (BB)

Thur. 10/13 Smoke and Sewage: Creating the Sanitary City

Readings

None.

Week Eight

Tues 10/18 Urban Pastoral: Parks and Cemeteries
Video Clips: "Order and Disorder," *New York*, " (PBS series, 2000)
Discussion: *Eden on the Charles*

Readings

Michael Rawson, *Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 22-74.

Thur. 10/20 The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number?:
Conservation, Preservation, & the National Parks
Video Clips: *The Greatest Good* (2006)
The National Parks (PBS series, 2010)

Readings

David Stradling, "Introduction," *Conservation in the Progressive Era: Classic Texts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004). (BB)

Week Nine

Tues 10/25 Seeing Like a State: Managing Forests, Fish, and Wildlife

Readings

None. But see note for Thur. readings.

Thur. 10/27 New Deal Nature: Dust Bowl, Dams, and the CCC
Video Clips: *The River* (1937), *The CCC* (2009)

Readings

** Begin reading Worster, *Dust Bowl*. Don't wait until next week to start!! I suggest reading p. 1-97 of his book, at a minimum, by the end of this week.

Week Ten

Tues 11/1 Discussion of *Dust Bowl*
Video Clips: *Dust Bowl* (PBS series, 2012)
<<RA Due>>

Readings

Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 1-97, 139-243, Afterword.

Thur. 11/3 Natural Enemies, Natural Allies: The Second World War & Cold War

Readings

Fiege, "7: Atomic Sublime," *Republic of Nature*, 281-317, 271-274.

Week Eleven

Tues 11/8 Post–War Suburbs and the Inner Cities

Readings

Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), xiii-14, 46-76, 111-135 (BB)

Thur. 11/10 Video: *Earth Days* (2009)

Readings

None.

Week Twelve

Tues 11/15 The Environmental Movement

Readings

Frank Zelko, “Challenging Modernity: The Origins of Postwar Environmental Protests in the United States,” in *Shades of Green: Environmental Activism from Around the Globe*, edited by Christof Mauch, Nathan Stoltzfus, and Douglas R Weiner, 13–40, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006). (BB)

Thur. 11/17 Energy Woes: Oil Crises, Oil Spills, and Three Mile Island

Readings

Fiege, “9: It’s a Gas,” *Republic of Nature*, 358-402.

Week Thirteen

Tues 11/22 ****No Class. Thanksgiving Break.****

Thur. 11/24 ****No Class. Thanksgiving Break.****

Week Fourteen

Tues 11/29 Anti-Environmental Backlash, Environmental Justice, and Neoliberalism
Video Clips: *A Fierce Green Fire* (2012)

Readings

James Turner, “‘The Specter of Environmentalism’: Wilderness, Environmental Politics, and the Evolution of the New Right,” *Journal of American History* 96, 1 (2009): 123-148. (BB)

Thur. 12/1 Images, Environmental Reform, and Eco-Consumerism
Video Clips: *The Earth Day Special* (1990)

Readings

Finis Dunaway, “Global Crisis, Green Consumers: The Media Packaging of Earth Day 1990,” *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 239-257. (BB)

Week Fifteen

Tues. 12/6 Heat: America in the Age of Global Warming
Discussion: Oreskes and Conway, "The Collapse of Western Civilization"

Readings

Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, "The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future."
Daedalus 142, no. 1 (January 2013): 40–58.

<<RA due>>

Thur. 12/8 The Lessons of Environmental History
** Take-home final distributed. **

Take-Home Final Due
Due Wednesday, December 14th, 5:00pm
(Submit on Blackboard)

Reading Analyses

The purpose of the reading analyses is to encourage you to read the course articles and chapters closely and critically. For this class, I want you to read the texts much more carefully than you typically do for most other course.

1) A list of the reading(s) discussed in the paper. The author's name and a pre-colon title are sufficient (e.g., William Cronon, "Kennebec Journey").

2) A brief, one to two paragraph summary of the main argument for that day's reading(s).

In particular, identify and summarize the author's argument and questions. Sometimes these questions are implicit rather than explicitly stated in the text.

3) Several paragraphs of synthesis and analysis. Some questions you might consider while analyzing the reading(s): How successful is the author at supporting his or her thesis? Is it convincing? Why? Is it well-written? How does it connect to or challenge other material from the class? Do you agree with the chapter, article, or book's conclusions?

If there are multiple readings for that day, you *should compare and contrast them*. Usually, when I include two readings for a particular day, the second reading builds upon or challenges some of arguments and claims in the first reading. You should be able to identify and explain these disagreements.

As much as possible, focus your analysis on the core issues and arguments addressed in the reading(s) and not peripheral matters.

Your entry should be completed before the class in which we discuss the reading. The due date is noted for each week on the syllabus with the notation <<RA due>>.

Turning in assignment:

- Submit your reading analyses on Blackboard. Click on the “Assignments” icon on the left-hand side of the course Blackboard page. Then, find the name and date of the reading assignment, click on that, and follow the directions for uploading your paper.
- I will read, grade, and provide comments on your reading analyses within one week of the due date (hopefully, even sooner)

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 no doubt adept at skimming material and getting a general sense of what it is about. Completing reading analyses 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. But don't take this as an excuse to write sloppy sentences and paragraphs.