

GEO 423
Urban Environmental History
& Political Ecology

Fall 2019

Tuesdays and Thursdays,
11:00am-12:20pm

Professor: Bob Wilson

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

Overview

When Americans think of nature, they often imagine places beyond the city limits: dark forests, high mountains, wild seashores, and the pastoral countryside. A journey into nature is one away from busy city streets and urban homes. Yet if we look closer, we can see nature everywhere in the city, most obviously in urban parks and green spaces, but also in the water that pours from our tap and the electricity that lights our homes. When we need to get rid of wastes, we rely on lakes, rivers, and the countryside to store our sewage and refuse.

The city is therefore a blending, or hybrid, of nature and culture. The modern city is uninhabitable without constant flows from the environment and the removal of wastes. Though rarely thought about by many residents, these flows make the modern city—and indeed, modern life—possible.

This course will look at the history of how people have altered the urban environment and mobilized nature in American cities from the early 1800s to the present. We will use the city of Syracuse and its hinterland, which have a rich, fascinating environmental history, as our “laboratory.” We will read key texts on the subject by a number of leading scholars and discuss them as a group.

More importantly, you will learn to do historical geographical research on some facet of Syracuse’s urban environmental history and write a paper on this topic. Along the way, you will learn the basics of urban historical geographical research and become adept at using and interpreting archival documents (maps, photographs, newspapers, and reports).

Learning Outcomes

- Describe and analyze the key processes that have modified the environments of cities and nearby regions.

- Describe and analyze the way natural processes and features have become enrolled in the making and functioning of cities.
- Identify the ways race, class, and gender have intersected as people have modified the natural environment and used it to create cities.
- Identify and evaluate primary sources relevant to urban environmental historical research such as reports, maps, and photographs and use them to write a historical research paper.

Grading

Attendance & Participation	15%
• Includes ‘found object’ exercise.	
Book Review	20%
Cities & Climate Change Essay	15%
Presentation	10%
Final Project	<u>40%</u>
	100%

A (95-100)	C (73-76)
A- (90-94)	C- (70-72)
B+ (87-89)	D (60-69)
B (83-86)	F (0-59)
B- (80-82)	
C+ (77-79)	

Attendance and Participation

Attendance and participation is absolutely crucial in this course—possibly more important than any course you have taken at SU. This course only works if students complete the readings, think carefully about them, and arrive prepared to discuss them with classmates.

Starting early in the semester, every class day will begin with one of you presenting a 2-3 minute “found object” on urban nature. These include newspaper articles, blog postings, YouTube clips—basically any cultural image or media object that you can show and analyze in class.

I encourage you to try to connect your found object to the week’s topic, but this is not required. You will be assessed on the relevance of the object to overall class themes and your presentation effectiveness.

You must (must) bring the assigned readings for the day to class. Students without the assigned readings will be marked absent even if they attend class that day.

Book Review and Cities & Climate Change Essays

You will have to write two short essays. One is a book review of *Eden on the Charles*, the other is on cities and climate change. I will distribute a handout about these two assignments later in the course.

Final Research Paper and Presentation

This research seminar will consider the relationship between people and nature in the city from an environmental history perspective. It will introduce students to archival research methods and field work through practical exercises in local archives and accessible research sites. Over the course of the seminar, students will develop their own independent research papers, pursuing some theme related to urban environmental history, and relying in part on original archival research.

This assignment has three components:

- 1) Research proposal. Provide a one-page statement outlining the focus of your paper and your research question. Also, provide a bibliography of sources examined to date.
- 2) Presentation about Research Paper. During the last week of class, you will give a presentation about your final research paper. Following the presentation, there will be a question and answer session with the class.
- 3) Final Research Paper. A 10-page paper about some aspect of Syracuse's urban environmental history. I will discuss this in further detail.

Course Texts

Rawson, Michael. *Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Goodell, Jeff. *The Water Will Come: Rising Seas, Sinking Cities, and the Remaking of the Civilized World*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2017.

* These texts are available at the SU Bookstore. Of course, you may be able to find cheaper copies online.

Course Schedule

(BB) – Reading available on Blackboard

Week One

Tues. 8/27 Introduction

Thurs. 8/29 Urban Nature

Readings

Price, Jenny. "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A." *The Believer*, April 2006 (Parts I & II) (BB)

Week Two Urban Nature in Early America

Tues. 9/3

Readings

Rawson, *Eden on the Charles*, Preface and Prologue, vii-21.

Thurs. 9/5

Readings

Rawson, *Eden on the Charles*, Chapter 1, 22-74.

Week Three Disease and the City | Historical Maps

Tues. 9/10

Readings

Rosenberg, Charles. *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962. (BB)

Smith, Billy B. *Ship of Death: A Voyage That Changed the Atlantic World*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013 (BB).

Thurs. 9/12 Historical Maps of Syracuse

Meeting with John Olson, SU Map Librarian

Location: Bird Library, Third Floor, Map Room.

** Meet in the Map Room, 11:00am, sharp. ☺ **

Readings

Schein, Richard H. "Cultural Landscapes." In *Research Methods in Geography*, edited by Basil Gomez and John Paul Jones III. 222-40. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. (BB)

Week Four Water for the Metropolis | Gilded Age Environmental Crisis

Tues. 9/17

Readings

Rawson, *Eden on the Charles*, Chapter 2, 75-128.

Thurs. 9/19

Readings

White, Richard. 2017. "Dying for Progress." *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896*. New York: Oxford University Press, 477-517.

Week Five Building Infrastructure | Archival Research

Tues. 9/24

Readings

Rawson, *Eden on the Charles*, Chapter 4, 179-232.

Thur., 9/26 Archival Research – SU Special Collections

Grace Wagner, Special Collection Access Services Supervisor

Location: Bird Library, Fifth Floor.

** Meet at Special Collections, 11:00am, sharp. ☺ **

Readings

Harris, Cole. "Archival Fieldwork." *Geographical Review* 91, no. 1-2 (January/April 2001): 328-34.

(BB)

Cronon, William. "Learning to Do Historical Research: Sources, Manuscripts, and Archives." *Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer for Environmental Historians and Others*. (BB)

Week Six Sinks for Waste: Urban Air and Water Pollution | Historical Geography of Syracuse & Onondaga Lake

Tues. 10/1

Readings

Scheider, Daniel. *Hybrid Nature: Sewage Treatment and the Contradictions of the Industrial Ecosystem*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011. (BB)

Onondaga County Department of Water and Environment Protection. "Plant Guide: Metropolitan Syracuse Wastewater Treatment Plant." Syracuse, NY, n. d. (BB)

Thurs. 10/3

Readings

Semuels, Alana. "How to Decimate a City." *The Atlantic*, November 15, 2015. (BB)

Featherstone, Steven. "DestiNY, USA" (BB)

**** Saturday, 10/5: Environmental History of Syracuse Field Trip, ~9:00am-2:00pm. ****

- This field trip is *required* unless you have a legitimate excuse such as a participating in a sporting event (i.e., you're on a SU team) or club event, observing a religious holiday, or working.
 - Let me know if you can't come. If you must miss the trip, you will need to complete a short make-up assignment about the environmental history of Syracuse.
- The field trip will also include lunch—paid for by the department—at an Indian restaurant (yum!).

Week Seven Emerald Cities: Beautification, Urban Parks, and Urban Trees

Tues. 10/8

Readings

Rawson, *Eden on the Charles*, Chapter 5, 233-76.

Thurs. 10/10

Readings

Bukowski, Emily. 2019. "Using the Commons to Understand the Dutch Elm Disease Epidemic in Syracuse." *Geographical Review* 109 (2): 180–98.

****Turn in *Eden on the Charles* book review ****

Week Eight Suburbs

Tues. 10/15

Readings

Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. (BB)

Thurs. 10/17

Readings

Rome, Adam. *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. (BB)

Week Nine Urban Environmental (In)Justice

Tues. 10/22

Readings

Hurley, Andrew. 1995. *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. Preface, xiii-xv, 1-14. (BB)

**** Research Proposal Due – Submit on Blackboard. ****

Wed., 10/24

Readings

Lombardi, Kristen. "They Figured Our Neighborhood Is Black, so They'll Do It." *The Center for Public Integrity*, August 13, 2015. <https://publicintegrity.org/environment/they-figured-our-neighborhood-is-black-so-theyll-do-it> .

Week Ten Cities, Climate Change, and Sea Level Rise

Tues., 10/29

Readings

Goodell, Jeff. *The Water Will Come: Rising Seas, Sinking Cities, and the Remaking of the Civilized World*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2017.

- Prologues: Atlantis
- Chapter 2 – Living with Noah

- Chapter 11 – Miami is Drowning

Thurs. 10/31

Readings

Goodell, Jeff. *The Water Will Come: Rising Seas, Sinking Cities, and the Remaking of the Civilized World*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2017.

- Chapter 7 – Walled Cities
- Chapter 10 – Climate Apartheid

Week Eleven Cities, Vulnerability, and Natural Hazards

Tues. 11/5

Readings

Simon, Gregory L. “Vulnerability-in-Production: A Spatial History of Nature, Affluence, and Fire in Oakland, California.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 104, February 2015 (2014): 37–41. (BB)

Thurs. 11/7

Readings

None. Complete Cities and Climate Change Assignment.

Week Twelve Writing Compelling Research Papers | Presentations

Tues. 11/12

Readings

To be announced.

Thurs. 11/14 ** Presentations**

Readings

To be announced.

Week Thirteen Presentations

Tues. 11/19 ** Presentations**

Thurs. 11/21 ** Presentations **

Week Fourteen

Tues. 11/26 ** No Class. Thanksgiving Break**

Wed., 12/28 ** No Class. Thanksgiving Break**

Readings

None.

Week Fifteen

Tues. 12/3 No class. Finish Papers.

I will have “office hours” in our classroom 11:00am-12:20pm. Please come see me if you have questions/need tips for your final papers.

Thurs. 12/5 Final Papers due

Readings

None.

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) 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.

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*. For fall and spring semesters, 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/>).