

**GEO 400**  
**Urban Environmental History**  
**& Political Ecology**

Fall 2011

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

**Professor:** Bob Wilson

**Office:** Eggers 533 (5<sup>th</sup> floor; take the elevator)

**Office Hours:** Friday, 1:00-2:30pm

Or by appointment

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### **Overview**

When most of Americans think of nature, they imagine places beyond the city limits: dark forests, high mountains, rolling countryside, the wild seashores. 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 home. When we need to get rid of wastes, we rely on lakes, rivers, and the countryside to deposit our sewage and refuse.

The city is therefore a blending of nature and culture. (Or in the jargon of academics, hybrids, cyborgs, or quasi-objects.) The modern city is uninhabitable without the constant flow of aspects of 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. It is a seminar course, which means I will lecture very little. Instead, we will read key texts on this 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. At the end of this course, you will complete a long 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).

## **Grading**

Participation	15%
• Includes 'found object' exercise.	
Discussion Leadership	10%
Book Review	15%
Cities & Climate Change Essay	10%
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)	

## **Participation**

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 your 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, television or movie clips—basically any cultural image or media object that you can show and analyze in class.

In other words, show and tell for college students. 😊

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.

## **Discussion Leadership**

In later class meetings, one or two of you will be responsible for leading discussion. Although I am open to other suggestions, my suggestion is that each week the discussion leader(s) prepare 4-5 questions **and responses** to share with the class. This means you will not only be responsible for posing questions, but also must kick-start the discussion with your own **prepared** thoughts on the question (after which, the question will be opened up for the class as a whole to discuss). Obviously the questions cannot be of the “yes/no” variety, and must demonstrate substantial reflections on the week’s readings and themes.

## **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 its research question. Also, provide a bibliography of sources examined to date. (5%)
- 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 15-page paper about some aspect of Syracuse's urban environmental history. I will discuss this in further detail.

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### **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](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/>).

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.

## **Readings**

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

Robbins, Paul. *Lawn People: How Grasses, Weeds, and Chemicals Make Us Who We Are*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2007.

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

## **Course Schedule**

(BB) – reading available on Blackboard

### **Week One**

Tues. 8/30 Introduction

Thurs. 9/1 Urban Nature

#### **Readings**

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

- Available on the web. Google author, article title, and magazine title.  
(BB)

Room for Debate, "Are Research Papers a Waste of Time?" *New York Times*, 29 August 2011.

<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/08/28/are-research-papers-a-waste-of-time>

### **Week Two Urban Nature in Early America**

Tues. 9/6

#### **Readings**

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

Thurs. 9/8

#### **Readings**

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

### **Week Three    Disease and the City**

Tues. 9/13

#### Readings

*The Cholera Years* . Reading to be announced. (BB)

Thurs. 9/15    Historic Maps of Syracuse  
Meeting with John Olson, SU Map Librarian  
Location: Bird Library, Third Floor, Map Room.

#### 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**

Tues. 9/20

#### Readings

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

Thurs. 9/22

#### Readings

Gandy, Matthew. *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2002, 19-51, 70-75. (BB)

Kaika, Maria. *City of Flows: Modernity, Nature, and the City*. New York: Routledge, 2005, 3-10, 51-75. (BB)

### **Week Five    Building Infrastructure**

Tues. 9/27

#### Readings

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

Colten, Craig. *Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005, 1-15, 47-76. (BB)

Thur., 9/29    Archival Research  
Meeting with William La Moy, SU Special Collections  
Location: Bird Library, Fifth Floor.

#### Readings

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

### **Week Six    Sinks for Waste: Urban Air and Water Pollution**

Tues. 10/4

#### Readings

Tarr, Joel A. *The Search for the Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective*. Akron, Ohio: University of Akron Press, 1996, 7-35. (BB)

Keeling, Arn. "Sink or Swim: Water Pollution and Environmental Politics in Vancouver, 1889-1975." *BC Studies* 142/43 (Summer/Autumn 2004): 69-101. (BB)

Thurs. 10/6

Readings

Melosi, Martin V. *Effluent America: Cities, Industry, Energy, and the Environment*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001, 23-67. (BB)

**\*\* Saturday, 10/8: Environmental History of Syracuse Field Trip, ~9:00am-1:00pm. \*\***

- 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 this applies to you.

**Week Seven Emerald Cities: Urban Parks and Beautification**

Tues. 10/11

Readings

Gandy, Matthew. *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002, 77-102. (BB)

Thurs. 10/13

Readings

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

**Week Eight Urban Transportation**

Tues. 10/18

Readings

McShane, Clay, and Joel A. Tarr. *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007, ix-xi, 1-17, 165-81.

Thurs. 10/20

Readings

Norton, Peter D. *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011, 1-18, 243-62.

Meinig, D. W. *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History. Volume 4: Global America, 1915-2000*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, 3-43.

**Week Nine Suburbs**

Tues. 10/25

Readings

Rome, *Bulldozer and the Countryside*, Preface, Introduction, Chapter 1, xi-44.

Wed., 10/27

Readings

Rome, *Bulldozer and the Countryside*, Chapter 2, 45-86 and Conclusion, 255-70.

**and**

Last names A-L, Chapter 4, 119- 52.

Last names, M-Z, Chapter 7, 221-53.

**Week Ten American Green: Lawns, Chemicals, and Suburbs**

Tues. 11/1

Readings

Robbins, *Lawn People*, Introduction & Chapter 1, ix-17.

Thurs. 11/3

Readings

Robbins, *Lawn People*, Chapter 3, 5, 6, 8; 33-44, 72-116, 129-38.

**Week Eleven Urban Environmental Justice and the Nature of Gentrification**

Tues. 11/8

Readings

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

Thurs. 11/10

Readings

Reading(s) by Jeremy Bryson on cities, gentrification, and nature.

**Week Twelve Cities and Climate Change**

Tues. 11/15

Readings

Cullen, Heidi. *The Weather of the Future: Heat Waves, Extreme Storms, and Other Scenes from a Climate-Changed Planet*. New York: Harper, 2010. "Chapter 11: New York, New York," 227-59. (BB)  
Kahn, Matthew E. *Climatopolis: How Our Cities Will Thrive in the Hotter Future*. New York: Basic Books, 2010, 1-13, 44-77. (BB)

Thurs. 11/17

Readings

None. Turn-in brief paper on urban environmental history and climate change.

**Week Thirteen**

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

Thurs. 11/24 **\*\* No Class. Thanksgiving Break\*\***

**Week Fourteen**

Tues. 11/ 29 Presentations

Wed., 12/1 Presentations

Readings

To be posted online.

**Week Fifteen**

Tues. 12/6 \*\* No class. Finish Papers \*\*

Thurs. 12/8 Final Papers due

Readings

None.