

U.S. Environmental History

HIS 295-01; Spring 2008
Tuesday & Thursday, 2:15pm-4:05pm; ARH 120

Michael Guenther

Dept. of History
Mears 210; 269-4958
guenthmb@grinnell.edu
Office Hours: M, W, 1:30-3:30

Course Overview

This course will introduce students to some of the central issues and debates in American Environmental History, ranging from the period of early colonial settlement to the present day. By focusing on the complex relationship between human communities and their surrounding environments, we will explore how the natural world has shaped the changing social, economic and political landscape of America, and conversely, how people have labored to transform, conserve, and appropriate nature to suit their own designs. Key topics will include: the shifting patterns of land use and resource management among Native American and settler communities; the ecological transformations wrought by commercial agriculture and industrial capitalism; the evolving role of the state in environmental policy; the growth of conservation and public health movements; and the changing ways in which people have conceptualized, portrayed, and interacted with the material world around them.

Required Texts

All required books are available for purchase at the Campus Bookstore. A copy of each text is also available on Reserve at Burling Library.

Ted Steinberg, Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History (2002).

Carolyn Merchant, Major Problems in Environmental History, 2nd ed. (2005).

William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England, 2nd ed. (2003).

Richard White, The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River (1995).

Adam Rome, The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism (2001).

Course Requirements

Class Participation

Class discussion provides our main opportunity to examine and debate the complexities of environmental history. It is crucial, therefore, that students come to each class fully prepared to participate and discuss the topics at hand. This involves not only completing the assigned readings prior to class, but also taking some time to think through the particular issues and questions that emerge from each text. Since class participation will count for 20% of your grade,

please make a serious effort to engage the readings and contribute your ideas, perspectives, and questions during each class.

Class Attendance

Please contact me if a medical or personal issue is preventing your class attendance, and have the relevant office (Health Services or Student Affairs) do the same.

Three short papers (5 pages in length), due Feb. 18th, Mar. 13th, and Apr. 16th

These papers will require you to engage critically with a specific historical issue or primary source, drawing upon the course material to create your own analytical argument. I will post the topics on Pioneer Web about two weeks before each deadline. Students who wish to explore a topic of particular interest for their third paper may talk to me ahead of time about the possibility of doing so. All papers must be typed, double-spaced, and in a 12-point font with consistent footnotes or endnotes. Additional guidelines for the papers will be discussed in class.

Final exam (take-home), due May 15th

The final exam will be in essay format and will be cumulative. Students will be expected to draw extensively upon the ideas and readings discussed throughout the semester. I will email the essay questions one week before the deadline.

Late assignments: Late papers will receive a deduction of 1/3 of a letter grade per day. Exceptions may be made for legitimate medical or personal issues. However, absolutely NO final exams will be accepted after May 16th. The college requires that ALL coursework be submitted by the end of exam week unless you are taking an incomplete in the class.

Disabilities: If you have specific physical, psychiatric or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Associate Dean and Director of Academic Advising, Joyce Stern, whose office is located in Rosenfield Center (x3702).

Grades:

Grades will be assigned according to the following formula:

Paper #1	Feb. 18	15%
Paper #2	March 13	20%
Paper #3	April 16	20%
Final Exam	May 15	25%
Class Participation		20%

Steady improvement over the course of the semester may be taken into account when assigning the final grades.

Class Schedule & Reading Assignments

I. Encountering Nature in the New World

Week 1

- Tuesday (Jan. 22): **Environmental History: Concepts & Approaches**
 Reading Due: Cronon, "A Place for Stories," (Blackboard); Merchant, Major Problems, pp. 2-9; 20-25 (essays by Worster & Merchant).
- Thursday (Jan. 24): **The Ecological World of Native Americans**
 Reading Due: Steinberg, Down to Earth, prologue & ch. 1;
 Krech, Ecological Indian, pp. 15-28, 45-72 (Blackboard).

Week 2

- Tuesday (Jan. 29): **Indigenous Patterns of Land-Use**
 Reading Due: Cronon, Changes in the Land, ch. 2 & 3;
 Silver, A New Face on the Countryside, ch. 3 (E-Reserve).
- Thursday (Jan. 31): **Contact & Colonization: An Environmental Perspective**
 Reading Due: Steinberg, Down to Earth, ch. 2; Merchant, Major Problems, ch. 2; and pp. 10-14 (essay by Jared Diamond).

Week 3

- Tuesday (Feb. 5): **Transforming the Land**
 Reading Due: Cronon, Changes in the Land, ch. 4-6
- Thursday (Feb. 7): **Puritans in the Wilderness**
 Reading Due: Merchant, Major Problems, ch. 3

Week 4

- Tuesday (Feb. 12): **Sharing the Land: The Cultural Ecology of Husbandry**
 Reading Due: Cronon, Changes in the Land, ch. 7;
 Anderson, "King Philip's Herd," (Blackboard).
- Thursday (Feb. 14): **Assessing the Colonial Land Ethic**
 Reading Due: Cronon, Changes in the Land, ch. 8;
 Donahue, "The Great Meadow," (Blackboard)

II. Putting Nature to Work: The Environmental Dimensions of Capitalism

Week 5

Monday (Feb. 18): **Paper #1 Due (5:00pm)**

Tuesday (Feb. 19): **Agriculture and the Rhythms of Pre-Industrial Life**
 Reading Due: Breen, Tobacco Culture, pp. 40-83 (E-Reserve);
 Merchant, Major Problems, ch. 4 (docs. 2-4, 6-7,
 & pp. 114-120).

Thursday (Feb. 21): **Working with Nature**
 Reading Due: White, The Organic Machine, introduction & ch. 1.

Week 6

Tuesday (Feb. 26): **The Quest for Mastery in the Lower South**
 Reading Due: Chaplin, An Anxious Pursuit, ch. 7 (E-Reserve);
 Merchant, Major Problems, ch. 4 (doc. 5, & pp. 120-7).

Thursday (Feb. 28): **Commercial Life in the New Nation**
 Reading Due: Merchant, Major Problems, ch. 5;
 Steinberg, Down to Earth, ch. 3-5.

Week 7

Tuesday (Mar. 4): **Little Market on the Prairie: Chicago & its Hinterlands**
 Reading Due: Cronon, Nature's Metropolis, pp. 97-147 (Blackboard).

Thursday (Mar. 6): **Nineteenth-Century Conceptions of Nature**
 Reading Due: Merchant, Major Problems, ch. 6.

Week 8

Tuesday (Mar. 11): **Golden Dreams: Mining and Fishing in the Far West**
 Reading Due: Merchant, Major Problems, ch. 8 (pp. 238-265); White, The Organic Machine, ch. 2; Steinberg, Down to Earth, pp. 116-22.

Thursday (Mar. 13): **The Changing Ecology of the High Plains**
 Reading Due: Merchant, Major Problems, pp. 274-301;
 Steinberg, Down to Earth, pp. 122-37.
Paper #2 Due (in class)

Spring Break (March 15-March 30)

III. Nature's Crucible: Environmental Challenges & Modern Society

Week 9

- Tuesday (Apr 1): **Conservation versus Preservation**
 Reading Due: Merchant, Major Problems, ch. 10 & 11;
 Steinberg, Down to Earth, ch. 9.
- Thursday (Apr 3): **Pollution & Urban Reform**
 Reading Due: Merchant: Major Problems, ch. 12;
 Steinberg, Down to Earth; ch. 10.

Week 10

- Tuesday (Apr 8): **Science to the Rescue?: Ecology & Pesticides**
 Reading Due: Merchant, Major Problems, ch. 13;
 Russell, "Speaking of Annihilation," (Blackboard).
- Thursday (Apr 10): **Avoiding Tragedy: The Politics of Natural Disasters**
 Reading Due: Steinberg, Acts of God, pp. xv-xxiii, 47-75 (E-Reserve);
 Seth Reice, The Silver Lining, pp. 1-23 (E-Reserve).

Week 11

- Monday (Apr 16): **Paper #3 Due (5:00pm)**
- Tuesday (Apr 15): **The New Deal & Environmental Planning**
 Reading Due: White, Organic Machine, ch. 3-4;
 Merchant, Major Problems, ch. 14 (doc. 1).
- Thursday (Apr 17): **King Corn: The Rise of Modern Industrial Agriculture**
 Reading Due: Steinberg, Down to Earth, ch. 7, 11, & 12;
 Pollan, Omnivore's Dilemma, pp. 15-99 (Blackboard).

Week 12

- Tuesday (Apr 22): **The Rise of Suburbia**
 Reading Due: Steinberg, Down to Earth, ch. 13;
 Rome, Bulldozer in the Countryside, pp. 1-86.
- Thursday (Apr 24): **The Problem of Waste Disposal**
 Reading Due: Rome, Bulldozer in the Countryside, pp. 87-118;
 Steinberg, Down to Earth, ch. 14.

Week 13

- Tuesday (Apr 29): **Environmentalism, Regulation, & Land Use**
 Reading Due: Rome, Bulldozer in the Countryside, pp. 153-219;
 Steinberg, Down to Earth, ch. 15.

Thursday (May 1): **Protecting Nature**
Reading Due: Rome, Bulldozer in the Countryside, pp. 221-270

Week 14

Tuesday (May 6): **Nature & Artifice in Modern Society**
Reading Due: Price, Flight Maps, ch. 3 (E-Reserve).

Thursday (May 8): **Environmentalism in a Global Age**
Reading Due: Merchant, Major Problems, ch. 15;
Steinberg, Down to Earth, ch. 16.

Exam Week (May 12-16)

Thursday (May 15): **Take-home Final Due (5:00pm)**