



## U.S. Environmental History

HIS 220; Spring 2010

Mon, Wed, & Fri, 1:15-2:05pm; ARH 120

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**Office Hours:** Tue, 10am-noon; Wed/Fri, 2:15-4:00pm.  
& by appointment

### 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 social, economic and political landscape of America, and conversely, how people have labored to transform, conserve, and appropriate nature to suit their ever changing designs. Key topics will include: the shifting patterns of land use and resource management among Native American and settler communities; the environmental dimensions of colonization, the ecological transformations wrought by commercial agriculture and industrial capitalism; the evolving role of the state in environmental policy; the growth of conservation and environmentalism; and the changing ways in which people have conceptualized, portrayed, and interacted with the material world around them.

While the majority of our class time will be devoted to discussing the common readings, I will give a number of short lectures to provide more context, explore particular examples in greater depth, or occasionally to cover an interesting topic that simply could not be fit into the reading schedule. But I want to emphasize that class discussion is really the heart of the course—it provides an opportunity for each student to examine the issues in a critical light, to move beyond just reading “comprehension” to a deeper level of *analysis* in which you identify the essential components of an argument and explore how they relate to one another, and to the larger issues of the course. By sharing our different questions,

perspectives and insights, we all have an opportunity to get a better understanding of the past. It is also important to work on articulating your views to other people. Many times, we think we have a solid grasp of a topic or an argument, but then struggle to “find the words” to explain what we actually mean. This often happens when individuals sit down to write papers, and discover that their command of a topic seems to suddenly vanish as they try to actually formulate their ideas in concrete form. So I strongly urge you to participate fully in our group discussions throughout the semester. I will circulate discussion questions and topics before each class, so that you can prepare for our sessions accordingly.

The various writing assignments are also designed so that you have an opportunity to work through the web of complex issues raised by the course readings and discussion. The topics will be posted well in advance, and they will typically come from the discussion prompts. In other words, there should be no surprises. The idea is for you to approach the material in the same way that most scholars do—i.e. thinking about a set of issues over a period of time, debating your ideas with colleagues, and finally developing your arguments in compelling prose. In that spirit, I will also allow students to revise their papers and submit them for a new grade. As we approach the first assignment, I will circulate more detailed guidelines about writing, documentation, and the revision process.

### **Required Texts**

All required books are available for purchase at the Campus Bookstore. A copy of each text will also be available on two hour reserve at Burling Library. There are a number of shorter articles, essays, and documents that are also required reading for the course. These will be made available through the course module (Blackboard) on Pioneer Web.

Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford and New York, 2009).\*\*

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York, 2003).\*\*

Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York, 1985).

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

\*\*You may use a first edition copy of these works by Cronon and Steinberg.

### **Course Requirements**

#### **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.

### Class Participation

As mentioned above, class discussion provides our main opportunity to examine and debate the key issues of environmental history. It is crucial, therefore, that students come to each class fully prepared to engage the questions at hand. This involves not only completing the assigned readings prior to class, but also taking the appropriate time to address the discussion questions, to organize your notes accordingly, and to jot down specific examples and passages you want to highlight in class. Remember that effective note taking and class participation will lay the foundation for a focused grasp of the material, and will allow you to succeed when you return to these topics later for a paper or an exam.

Class participation accounts for 25% of your overall grade, and I take this evaluation seriously. I record a participation grade for each and every class session, using the following rubric:

A – Student arrived on time, listened attentively throughout the class or took notes; spoke at least twice; referred directly to the text, demonstrated a true command of the issues, or responded thoughtfully to another student’s comment.

B – Student was reasonably attentive and on time; they appeared to be following the discussion; they asked a question or made a general comment (or two) that showed they did the reading, but lacked specificity or interpretive focus.

C – Student was tardy or distracted during class; their contribution to the discussion was limited to either a.) a cursory comment b.) a general opinion that was not rooted in the course material c.) a question that did not show a genuine engagement with the issues

D – Student did not participate in any meaningful way in the discussion, but did attend the class and was not disruptive.

F – Student did not attend class, or was disruptive (i.e. text messaging, passing notes, talking to others, etc.).

You will receive a mid-semester participation grade, so that you are aware of where you stand in this respect.

### Document Exercise (2-4 pages), due Feb. 12th

This assignment revolves around your ability to analyze a primary source from the perspective of an environmental historian. Each student will examine a small portion of Peter Kalm’s *Travels into North America*, a rich travel account written by an eighteenth-century naturalist. You will write a short essay interpreting the passage, and drawing connections to the larger themes that emerge in Cronon or Steinberg. Further guidelines will be distributed after the first week of class.

### Two short papers (3-5 pages), due Feb. 22<sup>nd</sup> and Apr. 23<sup>rd</sup>

These papers will require you to engage critically with a specific historical issue or debate, drawing upon the course material to create your own analytical argument. I will post the topics on Pioneer Web at least 10 days before each deadline. 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.

Midterm Exam, Mar. 15<sup>th</sup>

This in-class exam will be comprised of historical identifications, source analysis, and/or a map exercise. It will cover the material from weeks 1-7.

Final Project—Narrative Exercise—(5-8 pages), due May 19<sup>th</sup>

This assignment will require you to synthesize the course material, demonstrating a strong command of the issues we have covered over the semester (both methodological and substantive). Students will choose their own topic, and develop a narrative timeline that identifies the essential elements of a larger story they want to tell about the environmental history of America. An interpretive essay will accompany this timeline, explaining how these narrative points fit together into a compelling story, and how it relates to the work of other historians in the field. I will distribute guidelines for this project closer to the time.

Extensions & Late assignments: Late papers will receive a deduction of 1/3 of a letter grade per day. Exceptions may be made for extraordinary medical or personal issues. Each student is also allowed a **one time** extension of three days to turn in a written assignment late (the midterm is excluded) without incurring any penalty. You should email me in advance so that I am aware that you plan to use your extension for a particular assignment. However, absolutely no final projects will be accepted after May 21<sup>st</sup>. 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:

Document Exercise	Feb. 12	10%
Paper #1	Feb. 22	15%
Paper #2	Apr. 23	15%
Midterm Exam	Mar. 15	15%
Final Project	May 15	20%
Class Participation		25%

**Class Schedule & Reading Assignments**

- Please read the assignments in the order in which they are listed each day.
- Also, please bring a copy of the readings along with your notes to each class so that our discussion can be more focused & grounded (i.e. we should all be ready to refer to specific examples or passages from the texts, and to examine them together).

**Week 1 Environmental History: Concepts & Approaches**

Mon (Jan 25<sup>th</sup>): **Rocks, Trees, and the Course of History**

Reading Due: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford and New York, 2009), ix-xii, 3-7.

Aldo Leopold, "Bur Oak" and "Good Oak" in *Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York, 1949), 6-18, 26-30. (P-web)

Wed (Jan 27<sup>th</sup>): **Our Storied World: Nature & Narrative**

Reading Due: William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," *Journal of American History* 78 (1992), 1347-1376. (P-web).

Fri (Jan 29<sup>th</sup>): **Reckoning with "Deep Time" and the Pre-Historic Past**

Reading Due: Daniel Lord Small, "Toward Reunion in History," in *On Deep History and the Brain* (Berkeley, 2008), 1-11.

Jared Diamond, "The Evolution of Guns and Germs," in *Evolution: Society, Science and the Universe*, ed. A.C. Fabian (Cambridge, 1998), 46-63. (P-web)

**SECTION I**

***Nature and the New World: The Ecology of Colonization***

**Week 2 Two Worlds Collide: The Environmental Dimensions of Contact**

Mon (Feb 1<sup>st</sup>): **The Pre-Columbian Landscape**

Reading Due: Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 1.

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 2003), xv-15.

"Native American Oral Traditions." (P-web)

Wed (Feb 3<sup>rd</sup>): **The Paradox of Plenty**

Reading Due: Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, ch. 2-3.

Fri (Feb 5<sup>th</sup>): **Clashing Economies & Ecologies**

Reading Due: Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 2.

Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, ch. 4

### Week 3 Ecological Revolutions?: Explaining the Roots of Conflict

Mon (Feb 8<sup>th</sup>): **The Transforming Hand of Commerce**

Reading Due: Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, ch. 5-6.

Wed (Feb 10<sup>th</sup>): **Expansion & Conflict: The Political Ecology of Husbandry**

Reading Due: Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, ch. 7.

Virginia DeJohn Anderson, "King Philip's Herd: Indians, Colonists, and the Problem of Livestock in Early New England," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., 51 (1994), 601-624. (P-web)

Fri (Feb 12<sup>th</sup>): **Legacies of the Market: Cronon's Analysis of Capitalism**

Reading Due: Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, ch. 8.

***Document Exercise (due in class)***

### Week 4 The Rhythms of Pre-Industrial Life: Alternative Stories about Early America

Mon (Feb 15<sup>th</sup>): **Concord: Reflections from a Woodlot and a Meadow**

Reading Due: Brian Donahue, *The Great Meadow : Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord* (New Haven, 2004), preface, ch. 7. (P-web)

Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 3.

Wed (Feb 17<sup>th</sup>): **Putting the Culture back in Agriculture**

Reading Due: Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, 72-76.

T.H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Planters on the Eve of Revolution* (Princeton, 1985), ch. 2. (P-web)

Fri (Feb 19<sup>th</sup>): **Understanding Space and Place**

Reading Due: Group A.) Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York, 2002), 1-15, 85-108. (P-web)

Group B.) Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York, 1995), ix-29. (P-web)

**SECTION II**  
***Character and Commerce: The Evolution of American Society***

**Week 5 The Market Revolution: Putting Nature to Work**

Mon (Feb 22<sup>nd</sup>): **The World of Commodities**

Reading Due: Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 4.

***First Paper (due in class)***

Wed (Feb 24<sup>th</sup>): **Little Market on the Prairie: Chicago and the Grain Trade**

Reading Due: William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991), ch. 3. (P-web)

Fri (Feb 26<sup>th</sup>): **Rationalizing Nature: The Modernity of the South**

Reading Due: Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 5 & 7.

**Week 6 Revaluing Nature: The Politics and Meaning of "American" Landscape**

Mon (Mar 1<sup>st</sup>): **Romanticism, Nationalism, & the Embrace of Nature**

Reading Due: Perry Miller, "Nature and the National Ego," in *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Ma., 1956), 204-216. (P-web)

Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," *The American Magazine* (January, 1836), 1-12. (P-web).

Henry David Thoreau, "Walking" *The Atlantic Monthly* 9 (1862), 657-674. (P-web)

Wed (Mar 3<sup>rd</sup>): **Landscape Paintings and the Hudson River School**

Reading Due: Image Gallery of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Paintings (P-web)

Michael Heiman, "Production Confronts Consumption: Landscape Perception and Social Conflict in the Hudson Valley," reprinted in *Major Problems in Environmental History*, ed. Carolyn Merchant, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston, 2005), 186-192. (P-web)

Fri (Mar 5<sup>th</sup>): **The Cultural Battles over Nature, Work, and Class**

Reading Due: Paul E. Johnson, *Sam Patch: The Famous Jumper* (New York, 2003), ix-xiii, 41-77. (P-web)

**Week 7 Beyond the Myths: Examining the Conquest of the American West**

Mon (Mar 8<sup>th</sup>):      **The Unforgiving Frontier**  
 Reading Due:      Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 8.  
                              Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *Report of the American Historical Association* (1894), 199-227. (P-web).

Wed (Mar 10<sup>th</sup>):      **The Hydraulic Society**  
 Reading Due:      Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York, 1985), 3-60.

Fri (Mar 12<sup>th</sup>):      **Democracy and the Desert: Irrigation in the Arid West**  
 Reading Due:      Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, ch. 3.

**Week 8 The Gospel of Efficiency: The Rise of Conservation**

Mon (Mar 15<sup>th</sup>):      ***Midterm Exam***

Wed (Mar 17<sup>th</sup>):      **Conservation: Reform or Rationalization?**  
 Reading Due:      Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 9.

Fri (Mar 19<sup>th</sup>):      **Conservation: Going to the Sources**  
 Reading Due:      Conservation Documents (P-web).

***Spring Break (March 19-April 4)***

**SECTION III**  
*Nature's Crucible: Modernity and its Environmental Challenges*

**Week 9 Science and the Burgeoning Environmental Movement**

- Mon (Apr 5<sup>th</sup>):      **Reassessing the Origins of Environmental Reform**  
 Reading Due:      Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 10.  
                              Adam Rome, "Political Hermaphrodites: Gender and Environmental Reform in Progressive America," *Environmental History* 11 (2006), 440-463. (P-web)
- Wed (Apr 7<sup>th</sup>):      **Scientific Management and Reclamation**  
 Reading Due:      Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, ch. 4.
- Fri (Apr 9<sup>th</sup>):      **Science and Militarism**  
 Reading Due:      Edmund P. Russell, "'Speaking of Annihilation': Mobilizing for War Against Human and Insect Enemies, 1914-1945," *Journal of American History* 82 (1996), 1505-1529. (P-web)

**Week 10 Consuming Nature: The Rise of Agribusiness**

- Mon (Apr 12<sup>th</sup>):      **The Rise of Agribusiness**  
 Reading Due:      Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 11-12.
- Wed (Apr 14<sup>th</sup>):      **The Marriage of Big Capital & Big Water**  
 Reading Due:      Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, ch. 5.
- Fri (Apr 16<sup>th</sup>):      **Planning a Better Society: The Ironies of the New Deal**  
 Reading Due:      Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York, 1995), 48-75. (P-web)  
                              New Deal Documentary Film, The River (P-web)

**Week 11 Power & Modernity: The Hydraulic Empire of the West**

- Mon (Apr 19<sup>th</sup>): **Imperial Hubris**  
 Reading Due: Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, ch. 6.
- Wed (Apr 21<sup>st</sup>): **Small is Beautiful: Worster on Freedom & Responsibility**  
 Reading Due: Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, ch. 7.
- Fri (Apr 23<sup>rd</sup>): **Imperial Demands: Suburban Use of Water, Energy, and Land**  
 Reading Due: Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 13.  
**Second Paper (due in class)**

**Week 12 The Suburban-Industrial Complex**

- Mon (Apr 26<sup>th</sup>): **Creating the American Dream**  
 Reading Due: Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 1-86.
- Wed (Apr 28<sup>th</sup>): **Ghost Systems: The Hidden Infrastructure of Disposal**  
 Reading Due: Rome, *Bulldozer in the Countryside*, ch. 3.
- Fri (Apr 30<sup>th</sup>): **Waste & Want**  
 Reading Due: Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 14.

**Week 13: Ecology and the Birth of the Environmental Movement**

- Mon (May 3<sup>rd</sup>): **“Everything is Connected to Everything Else,”**  
 Reading Due: Carolyn Merchant, ed., “The Emergence of Ecology in the Twentieth Century,” in *Major Problems in American Environmental History*, ed. Merchant, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston, 2005), selections. (P-web)  
 Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (New York, 1971), 31-48.
- Wed (May 5<sup>th</sup>): **1969—Annus Mirabilis**  
 Reading Due: Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 15.

Fri (May 7<sup>th</sup>):      **Environmental Awareness: The Unlikely Catalysts of Change**  
Reading Due:      Rome, Bulldozer in the Countryside, pp. 153-219.

**Week 14      *The Revolution that Never Happened***

Mon (May 10<sup>th</sup>):      **The Rise & Fall of National Land-Use Regulation**  
Reading Due:      Rome, *Bulldozer in the Countryside*, pp. 221-270.

Wed (May 12<sup>th</sup>):      **The Trouble with “Nature”**  
Reading Due:      Jennifer Price, “A Brief Natural History of the Plastic Pink Flamingo,” in *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (New York, 1999), 111-165. (P-web)  
William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. Cronon (New York, 1995). (P-web)

Fri (May 14<sup>th</sup>):      **American Capitalism Goes Global**  
Reading Due:      Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 16.

***Exam Week (May 17-21)***

***Final Project: Due Wednesday, May 19<sup>th</sup> (5:00pm)***