

Environmental History 350L

Dr. Erika Bsumek

Office: GAR 2.104C

Class meeting time: M/W: 3:30-5:00

MEZ 2.118

Office hours: F, 2-3 or by appointment

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“To recover the nature of familiar historical subjects is to come to terms with nature in its fullest sense and with its centrality to the human experience. It is to realize that nature is infinitely larger and varied....it has engaged human life in multiple ways, on multiple registers. It is to realize that environmental history broadens the frame of scholarly inquiry and gives people a fresh view of the eternal problem of agency versus determinism, as humanity’s freedom to think and act inevitably encounters the limits that nature imposes. It is, finally, to realize that American history, in every way imaginable – from mountains to monuments – is the story of a nation and its nature.” Mark Fiege, *The Republic Of Nature* (9)

Topics in American Environmental History

This one-semester introduction to environmental history will examine some of the recent literature of environmental history. It will survey various theories and methodologies currently being used to write environmental history as well as those used in the past. We will assess how the field has evolved and attempt to determine where it might be headed in the future. As with the field itself, this course will focus on human interaction with the natural world, chart how nature has influenced the development of human life and technologies, and discuss the various political, intellectual, cultural, economic, and social meanings that people have attached to the environment at different moments in history. This course will be based on bi-weekly meetings to discuss readings that will be organized topically. Students will be required to write brief reviews course reading, lead two class discussions, give an in-class “found object” presentation, and complete a final research 8 to 10 page research paper on an environmental history topic. This course carries at Writing Flag.

Among the questions explored in this course will be:

- What is “nature?”
- What roles have science and culture played in our understanding of the environment?
- What did it mean to be an “environmentalist” at different historical moments?
- When are environmental issues political, economic, or social issues? When are they technical or scientific ones?
- What is the relationship between the history of the environment and the history of the United States of America?

Required Texts

The following books are available at the University Co-op.

Richard White, *The Organic Machine*

Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*

William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*

Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl*

Class Participation: Students are required to attend class.

THE SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE, CHANGES WILL BE ANNOUNCED IN CLASS AND CHANGES WILL BE POSTED IN THE ANNOUNCEMENTS SECTIONS OF BLACKBOARD.

ACADEMIC HONESTY and PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY: Academic honesty is very important. You are expected to complete your own work. If you have any questions about academic guidelines you may call me, 475-7253, or email me at ANY time. You should follow University guidelines regarding plagiarism and student conduct. For further information see:

<http://uwc.fac.utexas.edu/~virgil/essay/research/plagiarism.html>

Important Notes:

1. **Respect the classroom environment. Turn off all cell-phones while in class. Do not read the newspaper, search the web, or send text messages while in class.**
2. **Any handouts that you receive from me should be treated as required reading.**
3. **My office is on the 2nd floor in Garrison Hall. It is accessible by elevator. If, for some reason, my office is inaccessible to you, I will make arrangements to meet in a different locale.**
4. **The University of Texas provides, upon request, academic accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information contact the Office of the Dean of Students, 471-6259 or 471-4641.**
5. **I will follow University standards and rules regarding academic dishonesty. You should familiarize yourself with these standards [link provided above] and consequences of violations university policy.**
6. **Email policy: I do not accept papers via email. I will answer student emails within 72 hours of receiving them.**

To meet U.S. History Core Component requirements, this course will help students develop their critical thinking and communication skills. Students are personally responsible for their behavior in class and the work that they produce. This course will also cover the ways in which individuals have worked together to create responsible societies.

Selected readings: I will provide links to selected readings from Jstor. Copies of readings will sometimes be posted on Blackboard. Readings posted on Blackboard are marked with *BB on the syllabus. Occasionally, I will provide links to articles on the syllabus. Short lectures will sometimes be given and I will, on occasion, show films and documentaries that are relevant to the topics we are covering.

Course Requirements

Students will be expected to complete and assess assigned readings, offer your analysis, and actively participate in class discussions. Students will be expected to turn in **5 short, 1-2 typewritten page papers** on weekly reading assignments. Each paper will be worth 20 points. These papers will be due every Wednesday that we meet in class unless otherwise noted. Due dates are marked on the syllabus. You should think critically about the reading(s) and write a well-crafted reaction to the material. We will discuss how to write these on the first day of class. During the semester you will, periodically, exchange papers with your classmates. During exchanges you will read another student's paper, critique and edit it. [We will discuss how this will work in-depth in class.] **Total: 100 points.**

Paper Exchange: 10 points. (x2 = 20) **20 Points.**

Students will be expected to participate in **leading two class discussions**. You will be given two grades, a group and an individual grade. You will **meet with me before** you are scheduled to lead a discussion and we will discuss your presentation. You need to make an appointment with me no later than 6:30 on the Thursday before you are scheduled to lead your discussion the following Monday. The Friday before you are to lead the discussion, you will submit 5-8 questions to your classmates to consider. These questions should be posted on Blackboard. You are responsible for bringing a hardcopy of these questions to class. You should bring one copy for each student in the class and one copy for me.

Each discussion you lead will be worth a total of 50 points. (25 for each individual grade, 25 for each group grade.)

You will receive 100 points over the course of the class for leading discussion.

Students will write a **final research paper** on a topic related to class readings. You will be expected to **utilize course materials** and **conduct outside, primary research for this paper**. The paper should be between 8-10 pages in length. You will need to turn in a TOPIC EXPLANATION: worth 10 points by **Week 7** [Assignment instructions at end of syllabus.]

Paper Topic Assignment: **25 points**.

Final Papers: Worth **100 points**.

Found Object Presentation: Students will give an oral presentation on a “found object” that relates the readings we will be discussing in class. You will bring this object to class during weeks 11-12. How does material culture relate to the study of the past? What do everyday items tell us about the environment and how humans relate (or have related) to nature or the environment? What do they tell us about the history of the object itself? Found objects can be man-made or organic, real or representational. We will discuss this assignment in class.

Worth 25 points.

Questions: During week 11 and week 12, each student will be required to turn in two questions related to assigned readings. Each question will be worth 2.5 points. So, you will receive 5 points for each set of questions. ($5 \times 4 = 20$) If you are leading class discussion on those days, you will still need to turn in 2 questions – in addition to your discussion questions.

Worth 20 points total.

Total point breakdown:

Leading course discussion: 100 points

Final Paper: 100 points

Paper Topic: 25 points

Found Object presentation: 25 points

Questions for class weeks 11-12: 20 points

Paper exchange exercise: 20 points

5 weekly papers: 100 points

Students will be graded based on the percentage of points they earn in the class.

93-100 =

90-92 = A-

87-89 = B+

83-86 = B

80-82 = B-

77-79 = C +

73-76 = C

70-72 = C-

67-69 = D+

63-66 = D

60-62 = D-

Below 60: F

Web Resources for Environmental History:

Stanford, Spatial History Project

<http://www.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/index.php>

Introduction to Environmental History www.cnr.berkeley.edu/departments/espm/env-hist/eh-internet.html

American Society for Environmental History www.aseh.net/

Forest History Society www.lib.duke.edu/forest/

European Society for Environmental History <http://eseh.ruc.dk/>

Environmental History (the journal) <http://www.historycooperative.org/ehindex.html>

Environment and History (another journal) www.ericademon.co.uk/EH.html

Library web resources: Log into the Library “Research Tools” page. Pick, “Find Articles Using Databases” and you can utilize the following databases. I have picked articles from these databases so you can access them with ease.

<http://www.historycooperative.org/>

<http://www.jstor.org/>

Questions to consider as you do your weekly reading:

What is the argument of this work? What does the author say? How does he or she say it? What is the main topic discussed? Does the author accomplish his/her goals? What questions do you have about either the material, the argument, or the perspective being presented? Do you agree or disagree with the author?

Class Schedule:

Week 1:

8/29 introduction to class.

Week 2:

9/3 – Labor day, no class.

9/5: Thinking about nature and environment.

Steinberg, p. 3-21

William Cronon, “Why the Past Matters,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. 84, No. 1 (Autumn, 2000), pp. 2-13 *BB

Raymond Williams, “Nature,” in *Keywords*. Handout from first day.

*BB

Week 3: Nature and Early America

9/10

Mark Fiege, "Satan in the Land: Nature, the Supernatural, and Disorder in Colonial New England," pp. 23-56 *BB

Cronon, "In Search of Nature," in *Uncommon Ground* pp. 23-56

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.

9/12: 1st Paper due: Drawing on two of the four authors we read this week address the following questions: How can environmental history help us understand American history? What is nature? Is it an historical agent?

Invasions and Narratives of humans in Nature

Steinberg, ch.2

Merchant in *Uncommon Ground*, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," pp. 132-159

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.

Week 4: Wilderness

9/17: Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground*, pp. 69-90

Sam Hays, "The Trouble with Bill Cronon's Wilderness," *Environmental History* *BB.

Stienberg, ch. 3

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.

9/19: **2nd Paper due.** Address the following question in your paper: How does White define the human experience with nature? How does Cronon? Compare and contrast Cronon and White's conception of the relationship between nature and work.

Carolyn Merchant, "Shades of Darkness," *BB, you can also access this article from *Environmental History* (2003) 8(3) pp. 380-394

Richard White, *Organic Machine*, Introduction -29.

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.

Week 5:

9/24 Redirecting Nature

White, Chapter 2

Steinberg, ch. 4 and 5

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.

9/26: **3rd Paper due:** What, according to Richard White, is an organic machine? Can we use the ideas White presents in *The Organic Machine* to help us understand the places and events Steinberg writes about? **1st Paper Exchange exercise.**

Mini-lecture: Nature Resources and Nature

Week 6:

10/1: Humans, Nature, and Legacies

Steinberg, 6-8

Anne Whiston Spirn, "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted," in *Uncommon Ground*, pp. 91-113

Paper Topic assignment due – group 1 [m-z]

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.

10/3: Paper Topic due group 2: [a-l]

White, Chapters 3

Steinberg, 9 and 10

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.

Week 7:

10/8: Conservation/Preservation

Donald Worster, "John Muir and the Modern Passion for Nature" *Environmental History* 10(2005), 8-19. *BB document, and you can also find this article in via JSTOR in *Environmental History*.

Jennifer Price, "When Women were Women, Men were men, and Birds were hats," *BB Steinberg, Ch. 11

Discussion Leaders:

- 1.
- 2.

10/10: 4th Paper due. Drawing on this week's assigned readings (Worster, Price, Barbour and Drake) answer the following question: How did the ways that humans understood and interacted with the environment change between the 1890s and the 1950s?

Michael Barbour, "Ecological Fragmentation in the 1950s," in *Uncommon Ground*, (23-255).
Brian Alan Drake, "The Skeptical Environmentalist: Senator Barry Goldwater and the Environmental Management State," *Environmental History* or *BB
Steinberg, Ch. 12

2nd Paper Exchange Exercise.

Week 8: Man, Machines, and Natural Disasters

10/15:

Worster, *Dust Bowl*, Part 1

Steinberg, Ch. 13-14

Neil Maher, "A New Deal Body Politic: Landscape, Labor and the Civilian Conservation Corps," *Environmental History*. *BB

Discussion Leaders

- 1.
- 2.

10/17:

Worster, *Dust Bowl*, Part 2

Steinberg, Ch. 15-16

Discussion Leaders

- 1.
- 2.

Week 9: Humans and Natural resources

10/22: *Dust Bowl*, Part 3-4

Video: *A Crude Awakening?*

10/24

Dust Bowl, Part 5:

Paper 5 due (optional – you can write this paper, or one on 11/14): In what ways do politics and ideologies influence the ways that Worster and Basil Gepeke (director of the film *A Crude Awakening*) view the historical forces behind the consumption of natural resources?

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.

20 minutes for Found Object presentations: 4 presentations

Week 10:

10/29: Research day. Meet in Library with Michelle Osterow. Room TBA

10/31: Research day. Meet in Briscoe Center.

Week 11:

11/5: Social Justice and the Politics of Environmentalism

Adam Rome, "Give Earth a Chance: The Environmental Movement of the 1960s," *Journal of American History* 90:2 (September 2003), 525-554.

Giobanna Di Chiro, "Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice," *Uncommon Ground*, (298-320)

Discussion Leaders:

- 1.
- 2.

Each student must turn in 2 questions today. Worth 5 points.

20 minutes for Found Object Presentations

(I will pass out a sign up sheet, you must sign up for your Found Object Presentation during Weeks 9, 11-12)

11/7: From the Cold War to Current Events.

Mike Davis, "The Dead West: Ecocide in Marlboro Country," *New Left Review* 1:200 (July-August 1993). *BB

Paul Sabin, "'The Ultimate Environmental Dilemma': Making a Place for Historians in the Climate Change and Energy Debates," *Environmental History* (2010) 15(1), 76-93.

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.

Each student must turn in 2 questions today. Worth 5 points.

20 minutes for Found Object Presentations

Week 12:

Wilderness ideals and Environmentalists.

11/12

Mark David Spence, "Crown of the Continent, Backbone of the World: The American Wilderness Ideal and the Blackfeet Exclusion from Glacier National Park," *Environmental History* (1996), 1(3). *BB

Richard White, "Are you an environmentalist or do you work for a living?" in *Uncommon Ground*. Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.

Each student must turn in 2 questions today. Worth 5 points.

20 minutes for Found Object Presentations

11/14: Consumption and the Environment

Jennifer Price, "Looking for Nature at the Mall: A field guide to the Nature Company," *Uncommon Ground*. P. 86-203

Matt Klinge, "Spaces of Consumption in Environmental History," (Theme Issue: Environment and History), *History and Theory* 42 (December 2003): 94-110 *BB

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.

Each student must turn in 2 questions today. Worth 5 points.

20 Minutes for Found Object Presentations

Week 13:

11/19

No Class – research and writing week.

Class meetings: I will be in my office. You will be expected to sign up for an individual meeting with me. I will pass out a sign-up sheet in class. You must meet with me this week. In following weeks, meetings are optional.

11/21:

No class – research and writing week.

Week 14: I will be in my office during class time to consult about papers and writing.

11/26: - research and writing week.

11/28: - research and writing week.

I will post a sign up sheet on my door. Please sign up for a meeting if you wish to discuss your papers.

Week 15:

12/3: Writing day. I will be in my office during class time. I will post a sign up sheet on my door. Please sign up if you wish to meet to discuss your projects.

12/5: Final class meeting.

Final papers due: 12/7 in my office.

History 350 L
Paper Topic Assignment
Dr. Erika Bsumek

In order to write a good paper you will need the following:

1. An interesting topic.
2. A good historical question to ask and answer in your paper.
3. A set of primary sources in which to look for the answer.

Your assignment is to come to class with an explanation of your topic, a question (or questions) that will guide your project, and a list of **4-6 primary and secondary** sources you will use to write your paper. You should be prepared to discuss your topic with other students. (Make enough photocopies to share with your classmates.) Your ideas should be as well-developed as you can make them on your own. We will then use your ideas to help you refine your topic.

Here's how to get started:

Topics: My hope is that you'll use this paper assignment to explore one of the many topics in environmental history that we have either covered in class or another topic that you have a specific interest in. If you already have an idea in mind, start with that. If not, try looking through the list of class titles for the course or go through the index of one or more of your books.

Questions: Once you've got a general topic in mind, pose a specific question about it that you can ask and answer in your paper. A good historical question should meet the following requirements:

A good question is broad enough to interest you and your classmates.

A good question is narrow enough so that you can find a persuasive answer in time to meet the due date for this class paper.

A good question demands an answer that is not just yes or no.

A good historical question must be phrased in a way that the question does not predetermine the answer.

Primary Sources: A primary source is a document that was created at the time of the event or by the subject you've chosen to study or by people who were observers of or participants in that event or topic. Primary sources take many forms. Some are unpublished manuscripts and others are published books. You can find them in library stacks, in special collection or archives, or on the web.

Grades: This assignment is worth 10 percent of your grade. Final papers are worth 40 percent of your grade. Before you hand it in class be sure to put your email address on the first page so that I can respond to you with additional comments if necessary.

Final Papers:

After paper topics have been presented, I will schedule a meeting with each of you. At that time, we will discuss the different approaches you could take in your research papers.

You will be graded on the following criteria:

- The importance of the historical question asked
- Research
- Writing
- Analysis
- Conclusions reached

The final paper will be worth 100 points. Final papers should be between 8-10 pages in length. The paper topic will be worth 25 points.