

Note, add final paper rubric to the end of the syllabus and upload articles to canvas.

Environmental History 350R, AMS 329, URB 353

Dr. Erika Bsumek

Meeting times: Tuesday and Thursday from 2:00-3:30

GAR 1.134

Office hours: F, 2-3 or by appointment

Contact information: email: embsumek@austin.utexas.edu,

phone: 475-7253

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 of each week's reading, give an in-class "found object" presentation, and complete a final research 8 to 10 page research paper on an environmental history topic.

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? To address this last question, we can consider Mark Fiege's response:

"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)

Required Texts

The following books are available at the University Co-op. You can also buy them from half.com, Amazon, etc.

Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995)

Mark Fiege, *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012)

William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: Norton, 1996)

You will also be reading one of the following books:

Eward Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*

Tempest Williams, *Refuge: An Unnatural history of Family and Place* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991)

Questions to consider as you read assigned material:

What is the argument of this work? How does the author construct their argument? What is the main topic discussed? Does the author accomplish his/her goals? How does this reading relate to other topics covered in this class?

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

Class Participation: Students are required to attend class. You should come to class prepared and ready to speak about the readings, lectures, and issues presented in the course. Students are expected to participate in both smaller group work and larger class discussions. You will also be completing a number of “in-class” assignments. Your participation grade will be based on in-class assignments and your overall engagement with the course.

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 the instructor or teaching assistants 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 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 or other library databases. Copies of readings will sometimes be posted on Canvas. Occasionally, I will provide or 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

1) Students will be expected to complete and assess assigned readings, offer your analysis, and actively participate in class discussions. In addition to contributing to class discussion, you will need to find a news story, article or information on ahistorical event that relates to the topics we are discussing each week. You will bring this article to class and share it with the class. You do not need to make copies for the class but you will need to bring me a copy of the article. You should be prepared to explain how the article [or event] relates to the reading we are discussing. Participation will be worth 10 points per week when we are discussing material. (i.e. if there are 13 discussion oriented classes, point total would be 130 points.)

2) Students will be expected to turn in **4 short, 1-2 typewritten page papers** on weekly reading assignments. These papers will be due on Thursdays 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. Each paper will be worth 25 points. **Worth 100 points.**

3) 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 6:30pm on the day before you are scheduled to lead your

discussion. The day you are to lead the discussion, you will provide 5-8 questions to your classmates to consider. 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 25 points. Total 50 points.**

4) During the semester you will exchange two of your 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.] Students will read each other's work and engage in a two of peer review writing assignments over the course of the semester. **Each worksheet will be worth 10 points.**

5) Students will write a final paper on a topic related to the major class themes. You will be expected to **utilize course materials** and **conduct outside, primary and secondary 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 5 or 6** [. Assignment instructions at end of syllabus.]

Final Papers: worth 100 points

Paper topic assignment: worth 25 points.

6) Found Object Presentation: Students will give an oral presentation on a “found object” that relates that relates to the themes in the class. You may bring this object to class and even integrate it into the discussion you lead. The key question to be addressed here is: 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 it? What do they tell us about the history of the object itself? Found objects can be man-made or organic, real or representational. It would be ideal if your “found object” related in some way to your final research paper. But, this is not a strict requirement. Presentations should be 3-5 minutes long. **I will pass out a sign up sheet, you must sign up for your Found Object Presentation during Weeks 10-12. Worth 15 points.**

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/>

Class Schedule:

Week 1:

1/14 - Introduction to class. Syllabus review and general discussion about the class.

1/16: Thinking about nature and environment.

Fiege, Foreword by William Cronon, "Environmental History Comes of Age,"

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

http://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Cronon_Why_the_Past_Matters.pdf

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

Elizabeth Kolbert, "Recall of the Wild: How to Make A Prehistoric Landscape," *The New Yorker* (December 24 & 31), 50-60.

http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/12/24/121224fa_fact_kolbert or

<http://ksuweb.kennesaw.edu/~tkeene/envKolbert%20-%20Recall%20of%20the%20Wild%20%28New%20Yorker%29.pdf>

Week 2:

1/21

Mark Fiege, Chapter 1, "Satan in the Land: Nature, the Supernatural, and Disorder in Colonial New England," pp. 23-56

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

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

1/23

Invasions and Narratives of humans in Nature

Fiege, ch. 3, "The Cotton Plant and Southern Slavery"

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

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

4.

1st Paper due today: Drawing on two of the four authors we read this week address the following questions: How can environmental history help us understand American history? Note: when writing these short paper, you still must cite your sources. You can use either MLA, APA, or Chicago citing formats. Please contact me if you have questions.

Week 3:

1/28

Remaking the Land

Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground*, pp. 69-90
Fiege, ch. 4, "Nature's Nobleman"

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

1/30

Fiege, Chapter, 5, "The Nature of Gettysburg,"
Richard White, *Organic Machine*, Introduction -29.

2nd Paper due. Question: Compare and contrast the ways different authors (White and Cronon)) address the categories of nature and work. How does Fiege define the human experience with nature? Is his definition closer to White's or Cronon's?

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Week 4: Redirecting Nature

2/4

White, Chapter 2
Fiege, Ch. 6, "Iron Horses"

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

2/6

3rd Paper due: What, according to Richard White, is an organic machine?
First Paper Exchange exercise.

Week 5:

2/11 Regional developments and environments

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

White, Ch. 3, "The Power of the River"

We will also discuss the Paper Topic Assignment today.

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

2/13

Paper Topic due: group [a-l] Remember to consult environmental history resources (listed above) when writing this paper.

-Discussion of topics (see assignment sheet at the end of the syllabus).

-White, Chapter 4, "Salmon"

-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). *Canvas

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Week 6:

2/18: Conservation/preservation

Donald Worster, "John Muir and the Modern Passion for Nature" *Environmental History* 10(2005), 8-19. *Canvas 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," Course packet or *BB

Paper Topic assignment due – group [m-z] Remember to consult environmental history resources (listed above) when writing this paper.

Discussion Leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

2/20

Michael Barbour, "Ecological Fragmentation in the 1950s," in *Uncommon Ground*, (233-255).
Fiege, Ch. 7, "Atomic Sublime"

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Week 7:

2/25

Fiege, Ch. 8

Giovanna Di Chiro "Nature as Community: The Convergence of the Environment and Social Justice," in Cronon, p. 298-320.

Discussion Leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

2/27 - Research day.

Meet in Briscoe Center for American History or PCL (TBA)

Week 8:

March 4

Fiege, Fiege, Ch. 8, "It's a Gas"

Video: Video: *A Crude Awakening?*

March 6

In class discussion on Video

You should come to class with an article or news story (historical or contemporary) that relates to the video.

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Week 9: SPRING BREAK

MARCH 10-15

Week 10:

3/18 Video: *Who Killed the Electric Car: A Lack of Consumer Confidence or...Conspiracy?*

Questions to consider: In what ways do politics and ideologies influence the ways that the director of the film *A Crude Awakening* or *Who Killed the Electric Car* view the historical forces behind the consumption of natural resources? In class discussion

3/20: Class discussion of movie

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

First 4 Found Object presentations

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Week 11:

3/25: **Begin reading** *Monkey Wrench Gang* (MWG) or *Refuge*, first 50 pages of each.

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

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Found Object Presentations

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

3/27

Susan Davis, "Touch the Magic," in Cronon, p. 204-230

Reading: *MWG* or *Refuge*, You should read up to the half way point in each book by today.

MWG, up to ch. 15, *Refuge*, up to p. 174 ("Storm Petrel")

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Final Found object presentations:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Week 12:

4/1

Richard White, “Are you an environmentalist or do you work for a living?” in *Uncommon Ground*. Who are environmentalists?

MWG or *Refuge*, continue reading to the end of each book.

Refuge,

Discussion leaders:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Found object presentations:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

4/3

Climate Change, Guest Speaker, Prof. David Adelman

Reading: TBA

Paper 4 due:

Compare the larger points that you see either Edward Abbey or Terry Tempest Williams trying to make with the main themes in this course: (i.e. What does it mean to be an environmentalist? Which environmental concerns should take precedence in society?) Then, add your own assessment: In what ways, if any, are their concerns still relevant?

Final Paper Exchange exercise: After critiquing each other’s papers you will revise your own paper. Your revised paper will be due on 4/10 at 2:00. Turn it in to me in my office.

Sign up for individual meetings weeks 13-15.

Week 13:

4/8

No Class – research week.

Individual 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.

4/10

No Class – research week.

Individual meetings: I will be in my office. You will be expected to sign up for an individual meeting with me.

Week 14:

4/15 - No Class – research week.

Individual meetings: I will be in my office. You will be expected to sign up for an individual meeting with me.

4/17 – No class – research and writing week.

I will be available in my office for meetings.

Week 15:

4/22 – No class – research and writing week.

I will be available in my office for meetings.

4/24 – No class – research and writing week.

I will be available in my office for meetings.

Week 16

4/29: Last class meeting. Final discussion and paper recap. Come prepared to explain your research results to the class.

5/1: Papers due in my office.

History 350 R
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 25 points. 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 meet 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

Final papers should be between 10-12 pages in length.

I will pass out a rubric in class. I will also list it on Canvas.