

American Environmental History

ENVI 234/HIST 234

Macalester College, Fall 2009

MWF 1:10-2:10, Olin Rice 301

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Office Hours: MWF 9:30 –10:30, or by appointment

Access Moodle page as ENVI-234-01

Course Description

This course offers an introduction to American environmental history, a field that considers the relationships between humans and non-humans over time. We begin with the notion that culture, history and the environment are inextricably linked in complex interactions, and that these interactions mean that people *and* nature both shape and are shaped by the encounter. Following a largely chronological path (though we will diverge here occasionally), we will examine how nature and culture intertwine in a series of events, places, ideas, and landscapes, including the European colonization of North America, the Civil War, shifting notions of wilderness, the extirpation of wolves, the Dust Bowl, the rise post-World War II consumer culture, the emergence of the environmental movement, through to our post-industrial concepts of nature.

Objectives

Content:

- To think about the ways in which the environment has always been a central, though long-ignored, actor in history;
- To interrogate how the inclusion of non-human nature in historical accounts changes the story and what this new narrative might look like;
- To think critically about how meaning, practices and politics have shaped the American landscape, making and remaking how we come to understand nature in the US.

Learning:

- To hone our writing skills, from formulating a paper concept to refining the final product;
- To build on our analytical skills by engaging in a critical reading of all texts;
- To further our collaborative learning skills in group work and larger discussion to achieve mutual understanding;

Course Materials

There are four required texts for this course, which are available for purchase at the campus bookstore:

Jon Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America*
William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*
Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*
Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl*

All other course materials are available on e-reserve.

Evaluation

The grade for this course will be based on the following percentages:

First Paper (20%)
Second Paper (20%)
Proposal for final paper (10%)
Final Paper (30%)
Attendance and participation (20%)

First and Second Paper: 5-7 pages (20% each)

I will distribute the prompt for each of these papers on Moodle two weeks before they are due. These prompts will ask you to synthesize the lectures, reading, and discussion in the class to come to a larger understanding of the trends that have informed the environmental history of the US.

Due Dates: October 5th and November 16th, respectively

Proposal for final paper: 2 pages (10%)

Your term paper for this course will be to write a 10-12 page essay about an issue, place, person, or idea in environmental history of your choice. In order to prepare for this essay, you will write a two-page (500 words) essay proposal that will outline:

- What is the topic that you plan to investigate?
- What is the research question that you want to ask?
- Which of the texts or course themes will you use to build a conceptual frame for discussing your topic?
- What is your preliminary argument for the paper?

This proposal will help you frame out your topic. I will provide feedback on your proposal and you will revise and resubmit it to me for final approval.

In addition to the essay proposal, you will also submit an annotated bibliography of no less than **five** primary and secondary sources that you have consulted in your preliminary research. An annotated bibliography is a list of books, articles, primary documents, films, websites, etc. that

you will use in preparing your research statement. Each citation is followed by a paragraph or two that describes and evaluates the text for your research purposes. You might ask yourself the following questions when preparing your annotated bibliography:

- What are the main arguments?
- What topics are covered?
- If someone asked what this article/book is about, what would you say?
- Is it a useful source?
- How does it compare to other sources you have looked at?
- Is the source helpful to you?
- Has it changed your thinking about this topic

Due Date: November 30th

Final Paper: 10-12 pages (30%)

The final assignment in this course is 10-12 page research paper that examines a particular issue, place, person, or idea in environmental history of your choice, based on the feedback on your proposal. More details to follow.

Due Date: Draft: December 18th

Attendance and participation (20%)

A substantial proportion of your mark for will be based on your interaction with your peers as well as your instructor. One of the goals of this course is to encourage a collaborative and creative working and learning environment—your **engaged** participation is therefore a vital component to its success. Evaluating participation is always a subjective process; however, the following elements will be taken into account when determining the participation mark:

- *Attendance*—evaluating your performance is difficult if you are not present. As well, repeated late arrivals and early departures from class will be noted and form part of the evaluation of participation. Please communicate directly and immediately with me if you think you will miss or be late to a class.
- *Familiarity with the Readings*—participating in discussions will be difficult if the readings are not done ahead of time. They are integral to each class. You will be expected to demonstrate your knowledge and critical assessment of class readings, thoughtfulness regarding issues raised in readings, and to draw connections between theoretical ideas and specific.
- *Active Participation*—this means actively engaging in various activities including class discussions, asking questions during presentations/lectures, and taking part in small group and individual in-class exercises.
- *Contribution to the Learning of Your Peers*—participating fairly in group work (one element of the group assignment will be peer evaluations), being courteous and respectful of others, not dominating conversations and discussions, allowing others to speak and be heard

If you submit **any of the above assignments** late, you WILL be graded down one full step for each day past the deadline. For example, an assignment handed in one day late will begin with a B+; two days late a C+.

Final Grade Scale: A (95-100); A- (90-94); B+ (87-89); B (83-86); B- (80-82)

Similar ranges for C grades (70-79) and D grades (60-69); Below 60 is a failing grade.

Grading standards for papers

Below is an outline of how the papers in this course will be graded. While these are only guidelines, they should give you a fairly good idea of what I am looking for in your assignments.

An Excellent Paper (A 95-100)

- Offers an insightful, independent and original thesis, presenting new ways to think about the subject
- Arguments are clear, logical and well-supported by primary and secondary material as well as course themes
- Moves up and down the ladder of abstraction with a high degree of sophistication
- Addresses and refutes counter-arguments
- Extremely persuasive in argumentation and conclusions
- Transitions between concepts are superb
- Thoroughly and appropriately referenced
- Strong writing style (not overly wordy), no grammar and spelling mistakes, fluid and interesting to read – offers the reader a narrative which is engaging

A Very Good Paper (A- to B+ 87-94)

- Offers an insightful, independent and original thesis, presenting new ways to think about the subject
- Arguments are clear, logical and supported by examples from primary and secondary material
- Moves up and down the ladder of abstraction well
- Persuasive in argumentation and conclusions
- Citations are correct and appropriate
- Your writing style is clear and concise (not overly wordy), with few grammar and spelling mistakes – you make an effort to engage the reader

A Good Paper (B to B- 80-86)

- There is an identifiable thesis but it is not necessarily original or overly clear
- Arguments are generally solid, but may occasionally wander off course and demonstrate gaps in logic
- The paper does not utilize the ladder of abstraction, remaining either at the level of too much detail or too much theory
- The paper's conclusions may be somewhat weak
- Counter-arguments are not appropriately addressed
- Writing style is clear with few spelling and grammar errors, but is not necessarily engaging.

A Borderline Paper (C+ to C 73-79)

- A thesis is hard to identify and its development is generally unclear
- The paper is supported by some primary and secondary literature, but the examples provided are incomplete or insufficient
- The paper lacks logic and coherence
- Citation and referencing are poorly done or incorrect
- Does not address counter-arguments
- Has no real conclusion
- Writing style is generally unclear and uninteresting and there are repeated problems with grammar and spelling

A Needs Improvement Paper (C- to D- 60-72)

- An identifiable thesis is not present
- The structure of the paper lacks coherence and its argumentation is weak
- The paper does not synthesize course themes, let alone outside materials
- Citations and references to other works are used inappropriately, if at all
- Writing style is problematic in terms of spelling and grammar, leading to confusion about the paper's arguments

A Failing Paper (F below 60)

- No discernable thesis or attempt at a coherent and logical argument
- Little or no reference to course or outside material
- Clear that little effort was given to the preparation of the paper
- Writing style makes the paper difficult to understand

Academic Integrity: It is assumed that all members of the class will act with academic integrity and will not engage in behavior such as plagiarism, academic dishonesty, misrepresentation, or cheating. Please refer to the college's policy on academic honesty.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

I am committed to providing assistance to help you be successful in this course. Reasonable accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please meet with the Associate Dean of Students, Lisa Landreman, who will serve as the coordinator for services for students with disabilities. It is important to meet with her at the beginning of the semester to ensure that your accommodations are approved and in place to begin the semester successfully. The Associate Dean can be reached in the Office of Student Affairs, 119 Weyerhaeuser, by phone at 651-696-6220, or email llandrem@macalester.edu.

Help with writing

The MAX Center offers drop-in consultancy on writing projects, and can provide helpful feedback and advice on your work before it is due. The center is located on the first floor of Kagin Commons, and is open for tutoring Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., and from Sunday through Thursday from 7:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. Find them on the web at <http://www.macalester.edu/max/>, and be sure to check out the writing handbook at <http://www.macalester.edu/max/writinghandbook/index.html>. I strongly encourage all of you to make use of the Max Center's wonderful resources.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Week 1: What is environmental history?

- September 9th No reading
September 11th Cronon, "The uses of environmental history", pp. (e-reserve)
Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, pp. 2-7

Week 2: On the eve of contact and beyond

- September 14th Warren, "Seeing people for the trees", pp. 18-23 (e-reserve)
September 16th Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, pp. 10-38
September 18th Krech, "Eden" and "Deer," pp. 73-99, 151-171 (e-reserve)

Week 3: Plenty and want

- September 21st Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, pp. 3-33
September 23rd Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, pp. 34-107
September 25th Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, pp. 108-156

Week 4: Commodification and rationalization

- September 28th Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, pp. 159-170
September 30th Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, pp. 38-70
October 2nd Cronon, "Rails and water", pp. 55-93 (e-reserve)

Week 5: Wilderness: From the wicked to the sublime

- October 5th — **FIRST PAPER DUE – No reading**
October 7th Cronon, "The trouble with wilderness", pp. 69-90 (e-reserve)
Nash, "Preserve the wilderness" pp. 96-107 (e-reserve)
October 9th Thoreau, except from *Walden*, pp. 222-239 (e-reserve)
Emerson, "Nature", pp. 311-325 (e-reserve)

Week 6: New frontiers – South and West

- October 12th Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, pp. 71-115
Kirby, "Environmental view on the Civil War, pp. 1-11 (e-reserve)
October 14th Smith, "A land cursed by injustice" & "Possessing the land", pp. 39-97.
October 16th Steinberg, *Down to earth*, pp. 116-137
Flores, "Bison ecology and bison diplomacy ", pp. 465-485 (e-reserve)

Week 7: Nature's nation: The Frontier, Conservation, and Preservation

- October 19th Frederick Jackson Turner, "The significance of the frontier in American history", pp. 1-22 (e-reserve)
October 21st Muir, "A wind storm in the forests.", pp.1-7 (e-reserve)
Pinchot, "A primer of forestry, part II.", pp. 1-30 (e-reserve)
October 23rd Jakoby, "Nature and nation" and "Modes of poaching" pp 81-98.& 121-146 (e-reserve)

Week 8: Animals in environmental history: a case study of wolves in America

October 26th Coleman, *Vicious*, pp. 1-68

October 28th Coleman, *Vicious*, pp. 69-146

October 30th -----No Class Fall Break-----

Week 9: Wolves cont... & Unnatural disasters - The Dust Bowl

November 2nd Coleman, *Vicious*, pp. 147-236.

November 4th Worster, *Dust Bowl*, pp. 3-98

November 6th Worster, *Dust Bowl*, pp. 181-243

Week 10: Urban Environmental History

November 9th Cronon, "Dreaming the metropolis", pp. 23-54 (e-reserve)

November 11th Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, pp. 157-172

November 13th Davis, "How Eden lost its garden", pp.59-91 (e-reserve)

Week 11: The suburban dream

November 16th -- SECOND PAPER DUE – NO READING

November 18th Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, pp. 206-225

November 20th Rome, "Septic-tank suburbia", pp. 87-118 (e-reserve)

Week 12: The rise of environmentalism

November 23rd Leopold, "Thinking like a mountain" and "The Land Ethic", pp. 129-137 and 217-241 (e-reserve)

November 25th Carson, "A fable for tomorrow" & "And no birds sing", pp.1-3 & 103-127 (e-reserve)

November 27th -----Thanksgiving Break, No Class-----

Week 13: The rise of environmentalism, cont....

November 30th – PAPER PROPOSAL DUE – NO READING

December 2nd Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, pp. 239-261

December 4th Bullard, "Anatomy of environmental racism and the environmental justice movement," pp. 15-39 (e-reserve)

Week 14: Consuming the earth

December 7th Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, pp. 175-205

Schlosser, "What's in the meat?", pp. 193-222. (e-reserve)

December 9th Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, pp. 226-238

Strasser, "Having and disposing in new consumer culture", 162-201 (e-reserve)

December 11th Price, "Looking for Nature at the Mall", pp. 167-206 (e-reserve)

Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, pp. 283-285

Week 15: Course wrap-up - Lessons learned

December 14th Pollan, "Nature abhors a garden" & "The idea of a garden", pp.45-64 & 209-238 (e-reserve)

December 18th **Final Papers Due by 4pm via email or Moodle, or in my mailbox in Olin Rice 249**

