

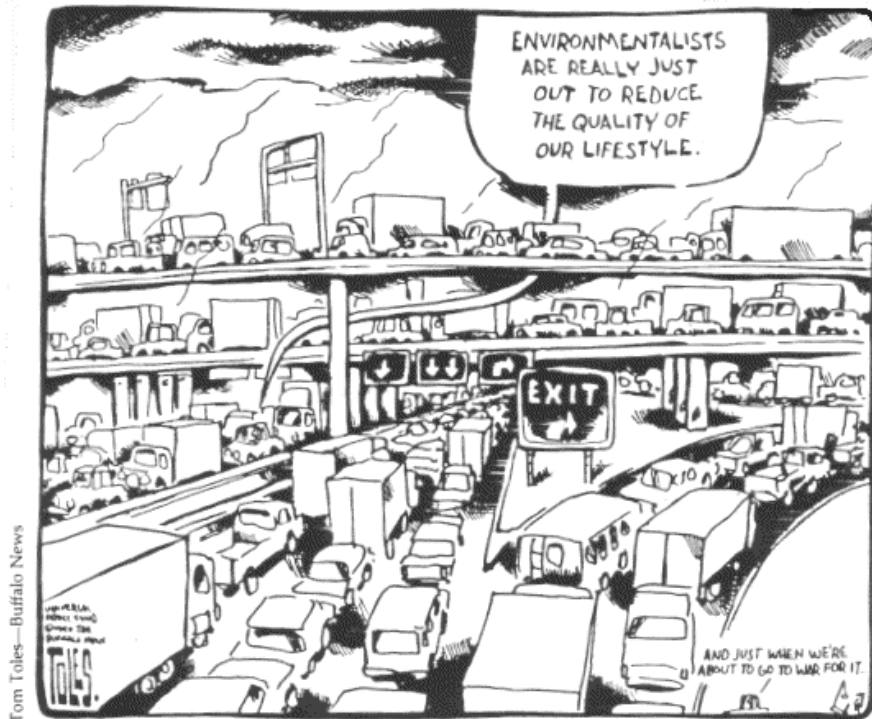
ENVI 345/HIST 345

**CAR COUNTRY:
THE AUTOMOBILE AND THE AMERICAN ENVIRONMENT**

Macalester College, Fall 2007
Olin Rice 270, TR 1:00-2:30

Prof. Chris Wells

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and by appointment



Course Description:

At the dawn of the twentieth century, automobiles were newfangled playthings of the very wealthy; by century's end, they had become necessities of the modern world. This momentous change brought with it a cascading series of consequences that completely remade the American landscape and touched nearly every aspect of American life. This course will explore the role that cars and roads have played in shaping Americans' interactions with the natural world, and will seek an historical understanding of how the country has developed such an extreme dependency on its cars. In the process, we will engage with current debates among environmentalists, policymakers, and local communities trying to shape the future of the American transportation system and to come to grips with the environmental effects of a car-dependent lifestyle.

Required Readings:

The following books are available for purchase at the college book store:

Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path*
Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways*
David Havlick, *No Place Distant*
Jim Motavalli, *Forward Drive*

Copies of all other readings, marked with an **X**, are available as e-reserves through the library. Access them at <http://www.macalester.edu/library/resources/reserves/index.html>, or through the course's Moodle website (<http://moodle.macalester.edu/>). One hard copy of each reserve reading will also be available at the library reserves desk.

Be advised that this course has an appropriately heavy reading load for a research seminar. I have chosen readings for readability and interest, but plan ahead—particularly when assignments are due—so that you are able to complete the readings for the day they are listed in this syllabus. *Completing the readings is vital to the success of this course.*

Grading: Your grade for the course will be calculated as follows:

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|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Book Review (2-3 pages) | 10% |
| Primary documents collection | 10% |
| “Critical commentary” (4-6 pages) | 25% |
| Participation | 25% |
| Research paper (12-15 pages) | 30% |

Assignments

The Book Review: Identify and read a book that addresses some aspect of the relationship between automobiles and the American environment and assess it in a 2-3 page paper. What is its argument? What are its greatest strengths and weaknesses?

The “Critical Commentary”: In a 4-6 page paper, select a subject of interest to you that deals with the relationship between automobiles and the American environment, broadly construed, and comment on that relationship in a way that is both accessible and historically grounded, easy to understand and intellectually sophisticated. Pretend you are writing for a large audience in a magazine such as the *New Yorker*, *Harper’s*, or *The Nation*, and that your goal is to set the agenda for a broad public discussion of your topic. Here’s your opportunity to play the role of a public intellectual: identify a pressing issue and comment on it in a playful and accessible—yet historically informed—manner.

The “Issues Discussion”: Once during the course of the semester, you will help lead a class discussion roughly twenty minutes long. To do so, you will need to identify two primary documents—one historical and one from the recent past—on some aspect of the day’s assigned reading. These documents should be a combined length of three pages or less. (You may need to excerpt documents to keep them within this required page range; please do *not* shrink the text to microscopic proportions.) You must upload these documents to our course webpage on Moodle by 6 p.m. the day before class, and you will take charge of the discussion that ensues.

The Primary Documents Collection: Complete this assignment as you wrap up your primary research for your research paper. For this assignment, you should:

- 1) Photocopy 10-12 of the best primary source documents that you have found as you have conducted your research. Edit or excerpt each document to a length of no more than two pages to include in the collection. Do not use more than two documents from any single source, and try to demonstrate the breadth of your research in the documents you select.
- 2) Record the full bibliographic information of each source using the footnote format from the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition. (Macalester subscribes to this as an electronic resource.)
- 3) Write a gloss for each source, limiting yourself to no more than one double-spaced, half-page paragraph for each one. As you write, consider questions such as: What does this source say? What are its biases? Why is it valuable? How does it interact with the other sources you have collected?
- 4) Divide your documents into 3-4 subject categories that you plan to use in your research paper. Use these categories to make a table of contents for the collection.
- 5) Write an introduction to your collection consisting of no more than one half-page paragraph. Explain its strengths and weaknesses as a base of evidence for your research paper. Where is your evidence strongest? What holes remain to be filled?
- 6) Provide the working title of your paper in Primary Title: Secondary Title format.

The Term Paper: Research papers should be on a topic of your own choosing that deals with some aspect of the relationship between automobiles and the American environment, and should aim for 12-15 pages in length. This paper should be based on a mixture of primary and secondary sources, and should represent your best efforts to think through the issues involved and to produce polished, carefully edited, thoughtfully considered prose. (For more on this assignment, see our course website on Moodle.)

Participation grades will be based on class attendance and participation in discussions. Discussions are the driving force in this class, so it is particularly important that everyone comes to class prepared to discuss the day's material. Our project in class meetings will be to explore connections between events, to answer questions, to clear up any confusion, to discuss the major themes of the course, and above all to engage with the readings. For those who are less comfortable than others speaking in class, remember that asking a good question is often as valuable a means of participation as delivering a long-winded oration. If you are having trouble speaking, however, please talk to me outside of class so that we can develop a strategy for improvement. Laptops should not be used during class discussions.

Regular attendance is required in order to receive a passing grade for the course, regardless of how well you do on your written assignments.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. All of your written work should reflect your own ideas, and should properly attribute the work of others who you engage. On avoiding plagiarism, see <http://www.macalester.edu/max/writinghandbook/plagiarism.html>.

Reading Schedule

All reserve items are marked X

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTIONS

R 9/6 Cars, Roads, and the Environment

WEEK 2: DEFINING PROBLEMS (74)

T 9/11 Cowan, "Automobiles and Automobility," 224-247. X

Kay, "The Road to Environmental Ruin," 79-99. X

R 9/13 McCarthy, "The Coming Wonder," 46-74. X

Please also spend some time with the valuable resources at:

<http://www.schrag.info/teaching/index.html>

WEEK 3: BEFORE THE AUTOMOBILE (126)

T 9/18 Wells, "The Changing Nature of Country Roads," 143-166. X

R 9/20 McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path*, 1-102.

WEEK 4: THE EARLY AUTO AGE, PART I (105)

T 9/25 Volti, "Why Internal Combustion?" 42-47. X

McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path*, 103-124.

Wells, "The Road to the Model T," 497-523. X

R 9/27 Interrante, "You Can't Go to Town in a Bathtub," 151-168. X

Kline, "Taming the Devil Wagon," 55-86. X

Book Review Due in Class

WEEK 5: THE EARLY AUTO AGE, PART II (179 + 52 optional)

T 10/2 McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path*, chs. 125-148, 173-228 (optional: 149-172).

Norton, "Street Rivals," 331-359. X

R 10/4 Burnham, "The Gasoline Tax and the Automobile Revolution," 435-459. X

Kitman, "The Secret History of Lead," 11-35 (optional: 35-44). X

Jakle and Sculle, "Marketing Strategies in the Petroleum Industry," 48-67 (optional: 67-84). X

WEEK 6: GENERAL MOTORS AND THE ANTI-STREETCAR CONSPIRACY (115)

T 10/9 Kwitny, "The Great Transportation Conspiracy," 14-21. X

Schrag, "The Bus is Young and Honest," 51-79. X

R 10/11 **Meet at Library for Research Orientation**

Zinsser, "The Tyranny of the Final Product," 255-264. X

Booth, Colomb, and Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 29-84. X

Lamott, "Short Assignments" and "Shitty First Drafts," 16-27. X

Please also revisit the resources at: <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/index.html>

WEEK 7: BUILDING ROADS BEFORE WWII (170)

T 10/16 Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 3-70.

Havlick, *No Place Distant*, 1-35.

R 10/18 Sutter, "Knowing Nature Through Leisure," 19-53. X

Louter, "The Highway in Nature," 36-67. X

WEEK 8: BUILDING STREETS BEFORE WWII (77)

T 10/23 Caro, *The Power Broker*, 499-575. **X**

Critical Commentary Due in Class

R 10/25 NO CLASS: FALL BREAK

WEEK 9: THE INTERSTATE ERA (176)

T 10/30 Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 71-178.

Mumford, "The Highway and the City," 234-246. **X**

R 11/1 Hanchett, "U.S. Tax Policy and the Shopping-Center Boom," 1082-1110. **X**

Jackson, "The Drive-In Culture of Contemporary America," 246-271. **X**

WEEK 10: PROBLEMS AND DISCONTENT (157)

T 11/6 Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 179-294.

R 11/8 Gutfreund, "Bridges, Bypasses, and Boulevards," 155-195. **X**

Annotated Primary Documents Collection Due in Class

WEEK 11: PARKING LOTS IN THE WILD: ROADS, RECREATION, & ECOLOGY (217)

T 11/13 Havlick, *No Place Distant*, 36-212.

R 11/15 Forman and Alexander, "Roads and Their Major Ecological Effects," 207-231. **X**

Forman, "Estimate of the Area Affected Ecologically by the Road System," 31-35. **X**

Jones et. al, "Effects of Roads on Hydrology, Geomorphology, and Disturbance Patches in Stream Networks," 76-85. **X**

WEEK 12: SMOG, OIL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS (100)

T 11/20 Doyle, *Taken for a Ride*, 17-98. **X**

Merrill, *The Oil Crisis of 1973-1974*, 14-28, 56, 60, 72. **X**

R 11/22 NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK

WEEK 13: UTOPIAN ASPIRATIONS ... (164)

T 11/27 Motavalli, *Forward Drive*, 51-151 (optional: 3-50).

R 11/29 Motavalli, *Forward Drive*, 175-237 (optional: 152-174).

Term Paper Drafts Due in Class

WEEK 14: ... AND DISMAL REALITIES (108)

T 12/4 Bradsher, *High and Mighty*, xiii-xxi, 61-80, 238-270, and 282-302. **X**

R 12/6 Roberts, "The Future's So Bright," 66-90. **X**

In-class screening of *Who Killed the Electric Car?*

T 12/4-Sun 12/9: **Peer Group Meetings**

WEEK 15: WHAT IS TO BE DONE? (125)

T 12/11 Kay, *Asphalt Nation*, 295-358. **X**

R 12/13 Duany, et. al, *Suburban Nation*, 183-243. **X**

T 12/18 **Final Term Paper Due by 1 p.m. by email, Moodle, or at my office**