

ENVI 340/HIST 340
U.S. URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

Macalester College, Fall 2006
Olin-Rice 270, TR 2:45-4:15

Prof. Chris Wells

Office: Olin Rice 249c
Email: wells@macalester.edu
Phone: 651-696-6803
Office Hours: M & W 3:30-4:30
and by appointment

Course Description:

In the minds of many Americans, cities are places where nature is absent—places where nature exists only in the crevices and on the margins of spaces dominated by technology, concrete, and human artifice. This course confronts this assumption directly, drawing on scholarship from the relatively young field of urban environmental history to uncover the deep interconnections between urban America and the natural world. Among other things, we will examine how society has drawn upon nature to build and sustain urban growth, the implications that urban growth has for transforming ecosystems both local and distant, and how social values have guided urbanites as they have built and rearranged the world around them. Using the Twin Cities as a backdrop and constant reference point, we will attempt to understand the constantly changing ways that people, cities, and nature have shaped and reshaped one another throughout American history.

Required Readings:

The following books are available for purchase at the College Bookstore:

William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*
Ari Kelman, *A River and Its City*
Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*
Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities*

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 (see below). 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 history seminar. I have chosen readings for readability and interest, but please 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:

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 people and the urban 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 people and the urban 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 by identifying a pressing issue and commenting on it in a playful and accessible—yet historically informed—manner.

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 periodical.) Record the full bibliographic information of each source.
- 2) Write a gloss for each source, limiting yourself to no more than one double-spaced, half-page paragraph per gloss. As you write your glosses, 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?
- 3) 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.
- 4) 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?
- 5) Provide the working title of your paper in Primary Title: Secondary Title format.

The Research Paper: Research papers should be on a topic of your own choosing that deals with some aspect of the relationship between people and the urban 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.)

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. Please consider using local issues!

Participation grades will be based on class attendance, participation in discussions, and your leadership of an “issues discussion” (described above). Discussions are the driving force in this class, so it is vital that everyone arrive prepared to discuss the day’s material. Our goal will be to analyze issues revolving around people’s relationships with the urban environment, to explore connections between events, to answer questions, to clear up confusion, to discuss major themes, 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.

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>.

Our course’s Moodle website duplicates much of the information in this syllabus, including the reading schedule and assignment due dates. It also provides a direct link to our course’s e-reserves, as well as an option for submitting your papers electronically. Go to <http://moodle.macalester.edu/>, and login using your Novell username and password. (These should be the same as for your email account.) After logging in, click on the link to U.S. Urban Environmental History in the My Courses section. Anything posted to any of the forums will automatically be emailed to everyone registered for the course.

Class Schedule

All **reserve items** are marked **X**

NOTE: You are also responsible for reading “issues” documents on our Moodle website.

UNIT I. THE RISE OF URBAN AMERICA

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTIONS

R 9/7 What is Urban Environmental History?

WEEK 2: CITY BUILDING (154)

T 9/12 Rosen and Tarr, “The Importance of an Urban Perspective in Environmental History,” 299-310. **X**

Price, “Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.” 220-244. **X**

Spirn, *The Granite Garden*, 3-37. **X**

R 9/14 Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, Prologue and ch. 1.

Kelman, *A River and Its City*, ch. 1.

Sat 9/16 **Optional Event: Sierra Club’s Tour de Sprawl bike ride (20 miles)**

WEEK 3: TRANSPORTATION AND URBAN GROWTH (153)

T 9/19 Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 12-44. **X**

Kelman, *A River and Its City*, ch. 2.

R 9/21 Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, ch. 2.

Kelman, *A River and Its City*, ch. 4.

WEEK 4: NATURE TO MARKET (162)

T 9/26 Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, chs. 3-4.

R 9/28 Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, ch. 5.

Book Review Due in Class

WEEK 5: THE GEOGRAPHY OF CAPITAL (122)

T 10/3 Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, chs. 6-7.

R 10/5 Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, ch. 8 and Epilogue

WEEK 6: DOING HISTORY (66)

T 10/10 Zinsser, “The Tyranny of the Final Product,” 255-264. **X**

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

R 10/12 *Meet on time in the classroom. Be dressed for the weather and have correct change for bus fare: one dollar bill plus four quarters. We’ll be back by 4:15.*

Field Trip to Minnesota Historical Society

UNIT II. ENGINEERING THE ENVIRONMENT

WEEK 7: CRISIS (42)

T 10/17 Steinberg, “Death of the Organic City,” 157-172. **X**

Martin Melosi, “Environmental Crisis in the City,” 3-28. **X**

R 10/19 NO CLASS: RESEARCH DAY

WEEK 8: THE EXPERTS RESPOND (23 required + 32 optional)

T 10/24 Schultz and McShane, "To Engineer the Metropolis," 389-411. **X**
Kelman, *A River and Its City*, ch. 3. (optional)

Critical Commentary Due in Class

R 10/26 NO CLASS: FALL BREAK

WEEK 9: TECHNOLOGICAL LANDSCAPES (86)

T 10/31 Teaford, "The Triumph of Technology," 217-250. **X**
Reisner, "The Red Queen," 52-103. **X**

R 11/2 NO CLASS: RESEARCH DAY

WEEK 10: THE ROAD TO AUTOPIA? (96)

T 11/7 Caro, *The Power Broker*, 837-894. **X**

R 11/9 Kelman, *A River and Its City*, Epilogue.
Mumford, "The Highway and the City," 234-246. **X**

Annotated Primary Documents Collection Due in Class

WEEK 11: SEPTIC-TANK SUBURBIA (152)

T 11/14 Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, chs. 1-2

R 11/16 Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, chs. 3-4

WEEK 12: WHERE NOT TO BUILD (118)

T 11/21 Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, chs. 5-7 and Conclusion

R 11/23 NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK

UNIT III: CLASS, RACE, AND URBAN ECOLOGY

WEEK 13: GREEN INJUSTICE (110)

T 11/28 Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities*, chs. 1-2.

R 11/30 Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities*, chs. 3-4

Term Paper Drafts Due in Class

WEEK 14: BURNING MALIBU? (126 required + 41 optional)

T 12/5 Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities*, chs. 5-7 and Epilogue

R 12/7 Davis, "The Case for Letting Malibu Burn," 93-147. **X**

Kelman, *A River and Its City*, ch. 5 (optional)

T 12/5-Sun 12/10: **Works in Progress Peer Group Meetings through the MAX Center**

WEEK 15: THE URBAN ECOSYSTEM (80)

T 12/12 Farber, "The Economics of Biodiversity in Urbanizing Ecosystems," 263-281. **X**
Coffin and Elder, "Building Public Awareness About the Effects of Sprawl on Biodiversity," 335-348. **X**

R 12/14 Spirn, *The Granite Garden*, 229-275. **X**

T 12/19 **Final Papers Due by 2:45 p.m., electronically or at my office**