Environmental Studies/History 326 American Environmental History Fall 2013

TTH, 9:40-11:10, Sage 4224

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What is Environmental History? Environmental history is the study of the interactions between human societies and the natural world over time. In this course, we will study American environmental history from European arrival in North America to the present. We will study the ways that different groups of Americans adapted to and changed the landscape, and also examine their ideas about nature.

The course has five explicit themes: Putting nature into history; ways of knowing nature; reading the landscape; the role of region; and the relationship between history and sustainability. A central premise throughout will be that much of the familiar terrain of American history looks very different when seen in its environmental context, and that one learns a great deal about both history and the environment by studying them together. The separate regions of the United States have different environments; the characteristics of these landscapes have shaped patterns of human life. We will look at the everyday lives of everyday people, asking how their labor, their religion, and their cultures influenced their interactions with the natural world. In our focus on region, we will pay particular attention to our own home—the North American Great Lakes. Although we typically think of sustainability as a forward-thinking concept, in this course we use it as a lens of inquiry to help us understand human/environmental interactions in the past. As a lens of inquiry, sustainability requires us to investigate the intersections of environmental change, economic activity, and social organization, and how these intersections have changed over time.

An additional goal of this class is to further your liberal arts education. What does this mean? The liberal arts education focuses on general learning, intellectual ability, and critical thinking rather than technical or professional skills. The goal of this class, then, is not just to convey specific information about environmental history (although you will learn much about this) but to teach you how to interpret this information critically, how to understand environmental change in its social, historical, and political context, and how to draw lessons from this history. A liberal arts education provides the tools we need to be active citizens of our communities. As we will learn this semester, active citizenship plays a key role in resolving the complex environmental dilemmas that have faced our society for centuries.

Learning Outcomes: In 2008, UW Oshkosh adopted a set of Essential Learning Outcomes to help define the meaning of a liberal education. This course will help students progress towards three of these outcomes: Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world; critical and creative thinking; and knowledge of sustainability and its applications. Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

- 1.) Have a basic understanding of the field of environmental history, its goals and methods.
- 2.) Recognize and understand how factors such as class, race, region, and gender have shaped the way that people understand and interact with the world around them.
- 3.) Critically analyze the intersections among environmental change, economic activity, and social structures over time; in other words, students will understand how the three pillars of sustainability (social justice, ecological responsibility, and economic security) have intersected with each other in American environmental history.
- 4.) Effectively communicate complicated ideas about environmental history in written format.

Discussion and Participation: Your participation in discussions and other class activities is essential. Lectures, discussions and other activities will be integrated. Come to class each day prepared to discuss reading assignments. You will be rewarded for perfect attendance; and your grade will drop significantly if you miss more than two classes. There will be no opportunity to make up short assignments or missed class sections. If you have more than five unexcused absences, you will fail the course. An "unexcused absence" is any absence for which you cannot provide a note from a doctor, another professor, or some other documented explanation of your absence. If you simply cannot make a class, please contact me before class meets; perhaps an arrangement can be made to ensure that you are not penalized for missing class for legitimate reasons. Your active participation is the key to your learning the material and to the success of the course—both for you as an individual and for the class as a whole. Attendance and participation are worth 20% of your total grade.

In addition, there will be a variety of short assignments, many completed during class, throughout the semester. These will range from short writing pieces to unannounced reading quizzes to found object exercises or internet searches. They will be collected and will count toward 5% of your grade.

Sometimes, I will send email announcements regarding the coming week's class. Please check your email account sometime on Monday afternoon for updates and last minute information about the upcoming class meeting. Email is generally the best way to get in contact with me.

Course Policies and Conduct: All of us must do our best to be intellectually honest and tolerant of personal differences. Environmental topics are often controversial, and we all have our own beliefs. I hope that everyone will feel safe to express an idea, even if that idea is not a popular one. There are some university guidelines for behavior that I expect all of us to follow. One of these has to do with plagiarism, or taking credit for the work of others. This is a serious offense and will be treated according to university guidelines; failure of the course is a potential outcome of academic dishonesty. This doesn't mean you shouldn't talk with other students about what you are thinking or writing; but when you write something on a paper or exam, it must be in your own words, not copied from someone else. If you have any questions about academic honesty, and what might or might not be considered plagiarism, please ask, rather than taking a risk with grave consequences. Please let me know what I can do to accommodate any disabilities that you might have.

Course Readings: The amount of reading fluctuates from week to week. Sometimes you are asked to read over 100 pages of a single secondary source; other times you are asked to give a close reading to only 30 pages of primary sources. Try to keep your eye on the syllabus so that you can tell when the heavier reading loads are coming, and plan ahead.

The following items are available at the University Book Store:

- Karl Jacoby, Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001)
- Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*, 3rd Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

The rest of the course readings will be available electronically through the Polk Library E-Reserve. These are REQUIRED readings; you are strongly urged bring them with you to class (in print or on a laptop, iPad, or e-reader) so that you make use them to aid in class discussion.

Exams: There will be in-class midterms on Tuesday, October 8 and Tuesday, November 12, and a take home final due Thursday, December 12. Further details on these exams will be announced later in the semester.

Place Paper: The pace paper is due in class on Tuesday, November 26. Choose a place you know well—for example, the town where you grew up—and write a 5-6 page paper exploring that place's environmental history. Use the ideas and materials that we have discussed in class to develop an interpretation of why your place developed in the way that it did. Because this is a brief paper, you'll need to think carefully about your interpretation, and which aspects of your place's environmental history you wish to explore. It is far better to discuss a few aspects in depth than many aspects superficially. This is not a research paper (although you are encouraged to conduct background research); your evidence should come from your observations of the landscape and the ideas and processes that we have discussed in class. The assignment will be discussed in greater detail in the weeks before the paper is due.

Grading Breakdown and Course Requirements

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Attendance & Participation	20%	
Reading Responses, Quizzes, & Short Assignments	5%	
Midterm 1	15%	
Midterm 2	15%	
Place Paper	20%	
Take Home Final	25%	

We will follow the standard university grading scale:

A	93-100	B- 80-82	D+ 67-69
A-	90-92	C+ 77-79	D 63-66
B+	87-89	C 73-76	D- 60-62
В	83-86	C- 70-72	F 59 and below

Course Calendar

Wk 1: Thursday, September 5 – Introduction & Course Themes

Wk 2: Tuesday, September 10 – The Columbian Exchange

Reading: Ted Steinberg Down to Earth (DTE), pp. v-viii, 3-39

Alfred Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics," ER

Reading Response due in class (1 page): On page 20, Steinberg discusses landscapes as artifacts. What does he mean by this? How does this concept help us understand human interactions with nature? Be sure to refer to both readings in your answer.

Thursday, September 12 – Indian Economies

Reading: Charles Mann, "1491," ER

Allan Greer, The Jesuit Relations, excerpts, ER

Wk 3: Tuesday, September 17 – Understanding the Fur Trade

Reading: Richard White, The Middle Ground, "Refugees," ER

Reading response due in class (1-2 pgs.): Referring to the readings that we have examined so far this semester, evaluate the sources of environmental history. How do environmental historians reconstruct the past? How do the tools of environmental history differ from those of other branches of history? Are there particular challenges to using these documents?

Thursday, September 19 – The Puritans Face the Wilderness

Reading: Steinberg, DTE, 40-54

Carolyn Merchant, Puritan primary source readings, ER Robert Cushman, "Reasons and Considerations," ER

Wk 4: Tuesday, September 24 – New England Economies: Household and Market

Reading: William Cronon, Changes in the Land, "A World of Fields and Fences," ER

David Foster, et. al, "The Importance of Land-Use Legacies to Ecology and Conservation," ER

Thursday, September 26 – Jamestown and the Search for Gold

Reading: Steinberg, DTE, 71-88

Carolyn Merchant, Tobacco documents, ER

Wk 5: Tuesday, October 1 – Rice, Tobacco, Slaves, and Soil

Reading: Mart A. Stewart, "Rice, Water, and Power," ER

S. Max Edelson, "Clearing Swamps, Harvesting Forests," ER

Reading response due in class (1-2 pp.): Pulling from Stewart and Edelson, DTE, and at least one primary source, construct an argument about the relationship between slavery and nature. Underline your thesis.

Thursday, October 3 - Visions for the American Republic

Reading: Jennifer Price, "Missed Connections: The Passenger Pigeon Extinction," ER Steinberg, DTE, 57-71

Wk 6: Tuesday, October 8 – In Class Midterm

No Reading

Thursday, October 10 – The Control of Water and the Emergence of Industry

Reading: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hawthorne's American Travel Sketches, ER

Carol Sheriff, The Artificial River, "The Triumph of Art over Nature," ER

Wk 7: Tuesday, October 15 – The Organic City

Reading: Steinberg, DTE, 155-69

Charles E. Rosenberg, The Cholera Years, excerpts, ER

"Benjamin Henry Latrobe on the Polluted Water in Philadelphia," ER

Thursday, October 17 – Romantics and the American Landscape

Reading: Documents in the "Romantic Nature Readings" folder, ER

Reading response due in class (1 pg.): Which of the authors read for today, if any, most closely aligns with your own beliefs about nature? Why, and what is it about the others that makes them seem more distant from your own perspective?

Wk 8: Tuesday, October 22 – Reshaping the Midwest: Rails, Meat & Wheat

Reading: William Cronon, Nature's Metropolis, "Rails and Water," ER

Thursday, October 24 – Reshaping the Midwest: Northwoods Lumber & Great Plains Settlement

Reading: Steinberg, DTE, 116-135

Pioneer Women Portray the Plains Environment, ER Begin reading Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*

Wk 9: Tuesday, October 29 – The Frontier in Environmental Thought

Reading: Karl Jacoby, Crimes Against Nature, xv-xvii, 1-78

Reading response due in class (1-2 pgs.): Considering examples from the Adirondacks, craft an argument about who wins and who loses in the conservation of nature. What motivates the various people involved in debates over whether or not to protect the natural world?

Thursday, October 31 – Coal, Steel, and the Urban Landscape

Reading: David Stradling, *Conservation in the Progressive Era*, excerpts, ER Robert Gottlieb, "Industrial Pollution and Reform," ER Continue reading Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature*

Wk 10: Tuesday, November 5 – The Emergence of Conservation

Reading: Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature*, 81-146, 193-98 Gifford Pinchot, "Principles of Conservation," ER

Thursday, November 7 – Environmental Crisis and the Great Depression

Reading: James Kates, *Planning A Wilderness*, ER Steinberg, DTE, 173-86

Wk 11: Tuesday, November 12 – In Class Midterm

No Reading

<u>Thursday</u>, November 14 – The New Deal—Planning vs. Conservation

Reading: Neil Maher, "A New Deal Body Politic," ER

Wk 12: Tuesday, November 19 – Atomic Era: How WW2 Changed the North American Landscape

Reading: Mark Fiege, "The Atomic Scientists, the Sense of Wonder, and the Bomb," ER Leslie Groves, Report on the Trinity Test, ER

Thursday, November 21 – Cities, Suburbs, and Cars; Place Paper due

Reading: Steinberg, DTE, 203-239

Rome, "Suburbs and Pollution," ER Wells, *Car Country*, excerpt, ER

Wk 13: Tuesday, November 26 – National Parks & the Wilderness Movement; Place Paper due

No Reading

Thursday, November 28 – Thanksgiving Break

Wk 14: Tuesday, December 3 – The Emergence of Modern Environmentalism

Reading: Steinberg, DTE, 240-68

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, "A Fable for Tomorrow," and "Elixirs of Death" ER Denis Hayes, "Earth Day," ER

"Santa Barbara Declaration of Environmental Rights," ER

Thursday, December 5 – Environmental Backlash

Reading: Andrew Hurley, Environmental Inequalities, "Rats, Roaches, and Smoke," ER

Reading response due in class: What do you see as the most important differences between what Hurley calls African American environmentalism and what might be termed "mainstream" environmentalism? What do Rachel Carson and the African American steelworkers of Gary, Indiana have in common in the way that they perceive environmental issues? In what ways are they different?

Wk 15: Tuesday, December 10 – Environmental History in Wisconsin

No Reading

Found object exercise: bring with you to class some modern object in which you can see traces of American environmental history. This object could be a magazine advertisement, a cereal box, a tv show—anything you want, so long as you can build a case for its relevance as a statement about environmental history.

Thursday, December 12 – No class; Final Papers in D2L dropbox by 1:00 pm