

History 901

TOPICS IN AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

INSTRUCTOR: Bill Cronon, 5103 Humanities.

Phone: 263-1840; this has an answering machine, and I'll try to reply to messages as quickly as I can.

No calls to my home phone number, please. You can also leave messages for me on email at CRONONW@MACC.WISC.EDU.

Office Hours: 10:00-11:30, Wednesday and Thursday mornings, first come, first served, at 5103

Humanities or 426 Science Hall; location to be announced. I would prefer to see you during these regular hours, but will try to schedule other times if necessary. Please don't just stop by my office if you need to see me at times other than my office hours, however; call first or see me after class to make an appointment.

DESCRIPTION:

The seminar is a one-semester introduction to some of the most interesting recent literature of American environmental history, read principally for the theories and methodologies it can offer scholars. The seminar assumes no previous coursework in the field, and students with a wide variety of backgrounds are encouraged to participate. We will read a number of the most important works that environmental historians have produced during the past two decades, with an eye to exploring the different themes and methods that have shaped their work. Our goal will be to evaluate these texts with a sympathetic but critical eye, trying to discover ways in which their approaches might be helpful to our own work. At the same time, we'll use this literature to think about the more general process of conceiving, conducting, and writing historical research, trying to gain as much practical wisdom as we can about how to do theses and dissertations. We will also talk about strategies for teaching this material in the undergraduate classroom.

As is typical of the field itself, we will be approaching environmental history from at least three different angles. First, we will ask how various human activities have historically depended on and interacted with the natural world: how have natural resources shaped the patterns of human life in different regions of the continent? Second, we will try to trace the shifting attitudes toward nature held by Americans during different periods of their nation's history: how have the human inhabitants of this continent perceived and attached meanings to the world around them, and how have those attitudes shaped their cultural and political lives? Finally, we will ask how human attitudes and activities have worked together to reshape the American landscape: how have people altered the world around them, and what have been the consequences of those alterations for natural and human communities alike?

We will approach these broad questions not through a chronological survey of all American history, but rather through an eclectic series of case studies focusing on different approaches and questions that have guided environmental historians in their work. (If you're interested in exposing yourself to a more chronological survey of the field, you're encouraged to audit History/Geography/IES 460, my environmental history lecture course, held on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 2:30 and 3:45. Please feel free to attend any lectures that look interesting to you.) Among other topics, we will discuss the concept "nature" as it relates to this field; the risks and opportunities of using scientific research to make claims about past environmental change; different narrative and metanarrative strategies that have

organized environmental storytelling; the political history of conservation and environmentalism; the reasons why class, gender, and race have not been strong loci for environmental historiography and possible ways to accommodate them more successfully; and the relation of history to contemporary environmental controversies and policy-making. For all students, one of our foremost concerns will be to explore the problems and opportunities this field offers for research and teaching so that seminar participants can work in it themselves if they so choose.

WORK

Reading assignments are fairly extensive, averaging 200-300 pages per week, but are generally not difficult and have been chosen as much as possible for their readability. Required readings are listed in the weekly outline that follows. A number of central texts are available at the University Bookstore:

- Clifford and Isabel Ahlgren, Lob Trees in the Wilderness, QH76.5 M6 A34 1984
 Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, SB 959 C3
 William Cronon, Changes in the Land, GF 504 N45 C76 1983
 William Cronon, Nature's Metropolis, F548.4 C85 1991
 Alfred Crosby, Ecological Imperialism, GF 50 C76 1986
 Robert Gottlieb, Forcing the Spring, GE180 G68 1993
 Robert Pogue Harrison, Forests: The Shadow of Civilization PN56 F64 H37 1992
 Thomas Huffman, Protectors of the Land and Water, GE198 W6 H84 1994
 Aldo Leopold, Sand County Almanac, QH81 L56 1966
 John McPhee, The Control of Nature, TD170 M36 1989
 Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, E169.1 N37 1982
 Michael Pollan, Second Nature: A Gardener's Education, SB455 P58 1992
 Donald Worster, Dust Bowl, F786 W87
 William Zinsser, On Writing Well, PE1429 Z5 1990

Course assignments often require only selected pages from these books. Use your discretion in purchasing them; all are available on reserve at Helen C. White Library. In addition to the books listed above, we will read a number of documents and articles (marked "R" on the weekly outline below), which will be available on our class shelf at the southwest corner of the Historical Society's reading room. **PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY READINGS UNLESS YOU ARE MAKING A COPY FOR YOURSELF; IF YOU DO SO, BRING THEM BACK IMMEDIATELY.** Please let me know at once if you find a reading missing from the shelf.

In addition to regular participation in class discussions, there are two written assignments. I will ask seminar participants to keep a journal, or writer's notebook, in which they regularly reflect on the material we're reading and discussing in class. Entries in this journal should average 2-3 typewritten pages, and should be turned in at the start of each week's seminar. Your entries can range from informal to formal, but are not meant to be polished essays; the exercise should not take an enormous amount of your time. I'll comment on your entries each week, offering reactions to your arguments and suggestions for possible ways to improve your writing, but the journals are not graded. You are allowed to take a maximum of five "bys" on this assignment (not to include the final class or the session following our field trip), so that you can skip writing the journal for five of our fourteen sessions, chosen at your convenience.

In addition to the journal, there is a more formal written assignment. As a way of making our discussions of historiography, research methodology, and teaching more concrete, I'm asking each member of the seminar to write a final paper which mimics one of three different major requirements you're likely to be facing later in your graduate program:

1. A research prospectus for a seminar paper, master's thesis, or doctoral dissertation; you will not actually have to write the paper for this course (though you're certainly welcome to do so as a thesis later on!); rather, the assignment gives us a way to orient our discussions toward practical research questions without having to try to complete an entire research paper in one semester ; or
2. A syllabus for an undergraduate lecture course or seminar on a topic in environmental history, akin to the syllabus requirement in the U.S. History Prelim, including a discussion to accompany the syllabus proper of the pedagogical rationale behind the course organization, readings, and assignments you've chosen; or
3. A historiographical review essay on a major theme in environmental history, surveying key historiography in the way you'd be called upon to do as part of your oral prelim exam.

These assignments are intended to help speed you along as you prepare to fulfill the major requirements in your program. You're more than welcome to choose any of the three different assignments, or even to discuss alternatives with me if none these seems perfectly suited to your needs. No matter which assignment you choose, however, members of the seminar will discuss each other's topics and critique each other's written work; intermediate deadlines for completing the written papers can be found in the weekly outline below. Whichever of the three genres of assignment you choose, you must have made up your mind about your choice by no later than September 28, preferably sooner. We will discuss tentative projects at our Saturday morning breakfast on September 17.

Note that there is a mandatory class field trip either on October 1. Students will be expected to write their next week's journal entry about the excursion, and no "bys" will be allowed that week. We will also have two class breakfasts, both on Saturday mornings, on September 17 and December 17. These are a mandatory part of the class, so please mark them on your calendar now. Your final journal entry (for which, again, no bys are allowed) should reflect on the seminar as a whole, and is due by the time of the last breakfast.

SYLLABUS, READINGS, AND HOMEWORK

(Readings marked with an "R" can be found on our class shelf at the southwest corner of the Historical Society's reading room. Each week's xeroxed readings will be in a separate folder; please keep the folders neat and well organized. To help you plan your work, the number after each week's topic is the number of assigned pages for that week. Readings are in rank order of importance for the week's discussion, so if you run out of time in a particular week, you're well advised to concentrate your work on materials at the top of that week's list.)

7 September: INTRODUCTORY (96)

Organization and requirements of the course, general discussion, screening of H. G. Hoskins' Making of the English Landscape.

Sometime during first couple weeks of class, read William Zinsser's On Writing Well, 3-80, 94-107, 265-73 (and other parts of the book that look interesting), for our discussions about writing and for the weekly journal you'll be keeping.

14 September: BRINGING NATURE INTO HISTORY (249)

William Cronon, "Kennebec Journey: The Paths Out of Town." (R)

Michael Pollan, Second Nature, 37-53. (R)

Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in Problems in Materialism and Culture, 67-85. (R)

"Environmental History: A Round Table," Journal of American History (March 1990), 1087-1147. (R)

J. B. Jackson, "By Way of Conclusion: How to Study Landscape," in The Necessity of Ruins, 113-26. (R)

Carl O. Sauer, "Foreword to Historical Geography" (1941), in Sauer, Land and Life, 351-79. (R)

Michael Williams, "The relations of environmental history and historical geography," Journal of Historical Geography, 20 (1994), 3-21. (R)

Daniel B. Botkin, Discordant Harmonies, 3-13. (R)

Richard White, "American Environmental History: The Development of a New Historical Field," Pacific Historical Review, 54 (1985), pp. 297-335 (read for main themes). (R)

Virginia Scharff, "Are Earth Girls Easy? Ecofeminism, Women's History, and Environmental History," Journal of Women's History, forthcoming, 1-20 typescript. (R)

Donald Worster, Appendix and Bibliography, The Ends of the Earth, 289-323 (skim bibliography). (R)

17 September: SATURDAY BREAKFAST, 9:00-11:00 (Mandatory)

Discussion of possible topics for final projects.

21 September: TELLING STORIES ABOUT NATURE: A SAMPLER (263)

William Cronon, Changes in the Land, 1-170.

John McPhee, Control of Nature, 183-272.

Margaret Atwood, "Death by Landscape," Saturday Night (July 1989), 46-53. (R)

28 September: READING THE LANDSCAPE, PART I (300)

Packet of Wisconsin maps; study (R).

Aldo Leopold, "Good Oak," A Sand County Almanac, 6-19. (R)

Kenneth I. Lange, "A Postglacial Vegetational History of Sauk County and Caledonia Township, Columbia County, South Central Wisconsin," Department of Natural Resources Technical Bulletin, No. 168, 1990, 5-36. (read quickly for method) (R)

May Theilgaard Watts, Reading the Landscape of America, 96-132, 133-47, 174-201. (R)

Emmanuel Fritz, Story Told by a Fallen Redwood, 1-6. (R)

Clifford and Isabel Ahlgren, Lob Trees in the Wilderness, 3-19, 39-192 (read quickly for approach)

Eric Sloane, Our Vanishing Landscape, in Eric Sloane's America, 139-47. (R)

John Curtis, The Vegetation of Wisconsin, 3-83, 87-91, 261-65 (recommended only). (R)

1 October: READING THE LANDSCAPE, PART II: CLASS FIELD TRIP

5 October: LANDSCAPE AND MEANING (272)

Robert Pogue Harrison, Forests: The Shadow of Civilization, 1-249 (read for main arguments).

Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in Problems in Materialism and Culture, 67-85. (R)

12 October: HISTORIAN'S WHOLE EARTH CATALOG

During the preceding week, seminar members will work as teams to explore library collections on campus that can be useful for researching environmental history; each team will distribute a brief written guide to the collection it examined, and will make a short oral presentation about it. Class discussion will focus on documents and research methods.

Library collections for exploration include:

Historical Society: Main Stacks, Manuscripts, Iconographic Collections

Steenbock Agriculture Library

Geography and IES Libraries

Biology Library

Geology Library

Land Tenure Center Library

Law Library

19 October: ECOLOGICAL INVASIONS (272)

Alfred Crosby, Ecological Imperialism, 1-103, 132-216, 269-308 (skim rest if you have time).

Paul Colinvaux, "Why History Happens," The Fate of Nations, 58-105. (R)

26 October: INVADERS AND INVADED (376)

William DeBuys, Enchantment and Exploitation, 1-318 (read quickly for main arguments).

Richard Nelson, Make Prayers to the Raven, xiii-xi, 1-32. (R)

William M. Denevan, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492," Annals of the Association of American Geographers (September 1992), 369-85. (R)

Chief Seattle, "Address to Governor Isaac Stevens," 1855. (R)

2 November: THE CITY IN NATURE (256)

William Cronon, Nature's Metropolis, 1-93, 207-59, 371-85. (R)

Robert Gottlieb, Forcing the Spring, 1-80, if available.

Andrew Hurley, "The Social Bases of Environmental Change in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980," Environmental Review 12:4 (Winter 1988), 1-19. (R)

Richard & Maisie Conrat, The American Farm, browse pictures. (R)

Symposia discussions of Nature's Metropolis in Antipode and Annals of Iowa. (optional) (R)

9 November: CAPITALIST DECLENSION (205)

Donald Worster, Dust Bowl, 1-97, 181-243 (skim the rest if possible).

Donald Worster, "Introduction," The Ends of the Earth, 3-20. (R)

William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," Journal of American History 78 (March 1992), 1347-76. (R)

16 November: A SPECIAL AFFECTION FOR THINGS WILD (207)

Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 1-7, 96-199.

Perry Miller, "The Romantic Dilemma in American Nationalism and the Concept of Nature," in Nature's Nation, 197-207. (R)

Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, 137-41, 237-95. (If you're using another edition, these are the essays entitled "Thinking Like a Mountain," and Part IV of the Book, "The Upshot.")

Michael Pollan, Second Nature, 176-201. (R)

TWO COPIES OF ROUGH DRAFTS OF FINAL PAPER DUE IN CLASS TODAY.

23 November: FROM CONSERVATION TO ENVIRONMENTALISM (263)

Thomas Huffman, Protectors of the Land and Water, 1-183.

Robert Gottlieb, Forcing the Spring, 81-161.

COMMENTS ON ROUGH DRAFTS DUE TODAY.

30 November: TOXIC POLITICS (259)

Guest participant: Arthur McEvoy, UW Law School and History Department.

Arthur McEvoy, "Working Environments," typescript. (R)

Arthur McEvoy, "Toward an Interactive Theory of Nature and Culture: Ecology, Production and Cognition in the California Fishing Industry," in Donald Worster, The Ends of the Earth, 211-229. (R)

Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, 1-37, 103-27, 187-98. (R)

Robert Gottlieb, Forcing the Spring, 162-323. (read quickly for major themes)

Hugh D. Crone, Chemicals and Society, 167-93. (optional) (R)

7 December: NO CLASS MEETING

Use week to polish final drafts of written projects.

14 December: ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY IN AND OF THE PRESENT: LESSONS? (225)

Bill McKibben, The End of Nature, 3-91.

Michael Pollan, Second Nature, 37-53.

William Cronon, "The Uses of Environmental History," Environmental History Review, (Fall 1993), 1-22. (R)

David Demeritt, "Ecology, objectivity and critique in writings on nature and human societies," Journal of Historical Geography, 20 (1994), 22-43. (R)

"Environmental History: A Round Table," Journal of American History, March 1990, 1087-1147; reread. (R)

Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in Problems in Materialism and Culture, 67-85; reread. (R)

FINAL DRAFTS OF PAPERS ARE DUE TODAY.

17 December: SATURDAY BREAKFAST, 9:00-12:00 (Mandatory)

Saturday breakfast of buttermilk pancakes, followed by a general discussion of how people think the approaches of environmental history might be incorporated more effectively into historical research and into environmental studies generally. We'll also have a final review of our written work and what we learned from it.