

HISTORY/GEOGRAPHY 932
TOPICS IN AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

INSTRUCTOR: Bill Cronon, 443 Science Hall.

Phone: 265-6023; 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. Your best bet for a quick reply is almost always to email me rather than phone, at wcronon@wisc.edu.

Office Hours: 10:00am-12:00pm, Wednesday mornings, first come, first served, at 5103 Humanities, at other times or by appointment. (I also have an office at 443 Science Hall, and am as there at least as much as I'm at 5103 Humanities; if you make an appointment, it will usually be at my Science Hall office.) I would prefer to see you during regular office hours, but will 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; email me first 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 and scientists as well as its implications for contemporary environmental politics and management. The seminar assumes no previous coursework in the field, and students with a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines are encouraged to participate. We will read a number of the most important works that have been produced in the field during the past twenty years, with an eye to exploring the different themes and methods that have shaped this body of scholarship. We will concentrate on what might be called the "second generation" of writing in environmental history, trying to assess how the field has evolved and where it might be headed in the future. Our goal will be to evaluate these texts with a critical but sympathetic 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 research about the past (whether within the disciplines of history, geography, ecology, environmental studies, natural resource management, or what have you) 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 a more chronological survey of the field, you're encouraged to take or audit History/Geography/Environmental Studies 460, my environmental history lecture course.) 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, and, conversely, the risks and opportunities of bringing historical perspectives to scientific scholarship; different narrative and metanarrative strategies that have organized environmental storytelling; the political history of conservation and environmentalism; the relation of environmental history to social and cultural history; and possible contributions that environmental history might make 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 quite extensive, averaging 300 or more 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:

William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, F548.4 C85 1991
 Dave Egan, *Historical Ecology Handbook*, GF13 H58 2001
 Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities*, HC108 G3 H87 1995
 Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*, SB486 S65 J34 2001
 Shepard Krech, *The Ecological Indian*, E98 P5 K74 1999
 Nancy Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares*, SD565 L36 1995
 John McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun*, GF13 M39 2000
 Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps*, QH81 P857 1999
 Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer and the Countryside*, GE197 R66 2001
 Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, GF27 S85 2002
 Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want*, HD4482 S77 1999

We will read most of these books in their entirety, so you may want to purchase them if you're able, but all are available on reserve either at Helen C. White Library or the State Historical Society 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 (by email is best) if you find a reading missing from the shelf.

Because the course is so reading-intensive and because my main goal is for us to think hard together about the theoretical and methodological issues raised by the texts we're examining, I've tried to devise writing assignments that can be done largely on the basis of materials we're already reading for the seminar. You'll be writing a few brief papers (typically 3-4pp) over the course of the semester, each requiring a focused analytical critique of a text we're reading for a given week. Then, at the end of the semester, you'll do a longer final writing assignment that can also be completed in a relatively self-contained way based on the required readings. The idea is still evolving in my mind, and I'd like to consult with the class before making a final decision about the final form it will take, but the basic

thought is to have you reflect on the current state of environmental history, its achievements and ongoing interdisciplinary challenges, and especially its relevance to contemporary environmental politics, policies, and management. Based on the works you'll have read by the end of the semester, what do you see as the most important contributions that an historical approach to environmental change can make to science, scholarship, policy, management, and politics? Or, more bluntly: what are the uses of environmental history? Again, we'll talk more about how to make these very large questions manageable before you tackle them yourself.

Note that there is an all-day class field trip scheduled on Saturday, October 8. We will also have two class breakfasts at either end of the semester, on Saturday, September 10, and Saturday, December 17, from 9-11:30am or so. The field trip and the breakfasts are a mandatory part of the class, so please mark them on your calendar now.

DIRECTIONS TO 2027 CHADBOURNE AVENUE

We'll be gathering for a pancake breakfast at my house on two Saturday mornings, September 10 and December 17, from 9:00 AM to roughly 11:30am. We're located at 2027 Chadbourne Avenue, which is the street that starts at the Field House parking lot one block north of Regent Street.

There are several ways to reach the place where Chadbourne Avenue meets Breese Terrace at the Field House lot. You can drive, walk or bike out University Avenue to where Campus Drive heads west. At this point, old University Avenue continues straight ahead, just before the Christopher Wren-inspired congregational church building. At the church, turn left onto Breese Terrace. At just about the point where you're passing the parking lot for the Field House on your left, turn right onto Chadbourne Avenue.

(If you prefer not to walk along University Avenue, which is understandable, you could also take the Lakeshore Path to where it hits the first parking lot, at Elm Drive. Take a left onto Elm Drive and go straight through the Ag Campus and over the bridge over Campus Drive. At University Avenue, go left for about half a block and take the first right; you'll be on Breese Terrace this way too. This route takes ten minutes longer than University Avenue on foot, but is much more scenic. You can't drive this way, which is one of its attractions. Total walk from the Union is about 30 minutes.)

OK, I assume you've now reached (by whatever route!) the place where Chadbourne Avenue heads west from the Field House parking lot. Go west. You'll pass a Tudor-revival elementary school (Randall Elementary) on your left after a couple blocks. At the end of its playground, you'll cross Roby Road. You're now in our block. We're on the left, the second house from the far end of this block: a three-story, Tudor revival, stuccoed house with 2027 shown plainly by the door. If you get lost, our phone number is 238-7160. See you Saturday!!

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. 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.)

September 6: Introductory

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

September 10: Mandatory Sunday Morning Class Breakfast

This begins at 9:00am and runs to about 11:30am, and will be held at my house: 2027 Chadbourne Avenue. You'll find directions above, toward the end of the syllabus.

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

Raymond Williams, "Nature," Keywords, 184-89. (R)

Oxford English Dictionary, entry on "Nature." (R)

September 13: Nature and Humanity: Agendas

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)

Richard White, "Environmental History: Watching a Historical Field Mature," Pacific Historical Review 70:1 (Feb. 2001), 103-11. (R)

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

J. M. Powell, "Historical Geographies of the Environment," in Brian Graham and Catherine Nash, Modern Historical Geographies (London: Longman, 2000), 169-92. (R)

Virginia J. Scharff, "Man and Nature! Sex Secrets of Environmental History," Seeing Nature Through Gender, pp 3-19. (R)

Alan Taylor, "Unnatural Inequalities: Social and Environmental Histories," Environmental History, 4:1 (Oct. 1996), 6-19. (R)

Dave Egan and Evelyn Howell, "Introduction," The Historical Ecology Handbook, 1-23.

Edmund Russell, "Evolutionary History: Prospectus for a New Field," Environmental History 8:2 (2003). (R)

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

SOURCE DISCUSSION: On documents in general.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: Write a brief paper (2-3pp) defining the word "nature" and assessing what you regard as the chief analytical challenges it poses for environmental historians.

September 20 Telling Stories About Nature

John McPhee, Control of Nature, 183-272. (R)

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

David Foster, "Thoreau's Country: A Historical-Ecological Perspective on Conservation in the New England Landscape," Journal of Biogeography, 19 (1537-55). (R)

William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," Journal of American History 78:4 (March, 1992), 1347-1376. (R)

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

SOURCE DISCUSSION: Storied objects.

September 27: Big Pictures

Ted Steinberg, Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History. (entire)

David Nye, "Technology, Nature, and American Origin Stories," Environmental History 8:1 (January, 2003). (R)

SOURCE DISCUSSION: Statistics.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: Write an 800-word book review (in the style of the American Historical Review or Annals of the Association of American Geographers) of Ted Steinberg's Down to Earth.

October 4: Reading the Landscape

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

Dave Egan & Evelyn Howell, Historical Ecology Handbook, 29-255, 295-333, 367-90.

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)

Jerry Apps, The Wisconsin Traveler's Companion (Madison: Wisconsin Trails, 1997); browse.

William Cronon, "Kennecott Journey: The Paths Out of Town," in Cronon, Miles, Gitlin, Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past, 28-51 (R)

SOURCE DISCUSSION: Field records: pollen, tree rings, soil profiles, etc.

October 8: Special Mandatory All-Day Saturday Field Trip

October 11: Native Controversies

Shepard Krech III, The Ecological Indian: Myth and History (entire).

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

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

SOURCE DISCUSSION: Colonial records and explorers' and travelers' accounts.

October 18: An Urban-Rural World

William Cronon, Nature's Metropolis, read entire if possible, but otherwise concentrate on 1-259, 371-85. (R)

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

Symposia discussions of Nature's Metropolis in Antipode (April 1994, 113-76) and Annals of Iowa (480-525). (R)

SOURCE DISCUSSION: Land surveys, tenure records, almanacs, agricultural records, etc.

October 25: Imposing Conservation

Karl Jacoby, Crimes Against Nature (entire).

SOURCE DISCUSSION: Legal records.

November 1: The Challenge of Management

Nancy Langston, Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares (entire).

(Nancy Langston will join us for part of this session to talk about her book.)

SOURCE DISCUSSION: National Park, National Forest, and other institutional land management records.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: Write a 3-4 page essay analyzing and critiquing the evidentiary source foundations of Langston's Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares.

November 8: Trashy Insights

Susan Strasser, Waste and Want: A Social History of Waste (entire).

Ellen Stroud, "Does Nature Always Matter? Following Dirt Through History," History and Theory 42(December 2003), 75-81. (R)

Gregg Mitman, "In Search of Health: Landscape and Disease in American Environmental History," Environmental History 10:2 (April 2005), 184-210. (R)

Christopher Sellers, "Thoreau's Body: Towards an Embodied Environmental History," Environmental History, 4 (1999), 486-514. (R)

SOURCE DISCUSSION: Material culture artifacts.

November 15: Class, Race, Environment

Andrew Hurley, Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980, 1-182.

Richard White, "Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?" Uncommon Ground, 171-85. (R)

Ellen Stroud, "Troubled Waters in Ecotopia: Environmental Racism in Portland, Oregon," Radical History 74 (Spring 1999), 65-95. (R)

Linda Nash, "Finishing Nature: Harmonizing Bodies and Environments in Late-Nineteenth-Century California," Environmental History 8:1 (2003). (R)

Carolyn Merchant, "Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History," Environmental History 8:3 (2003). (R)

SOURCE DISCUSSION: Images.

November 22: Cultural Constructions

Jennifer Price, Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America (entire).

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

Michael Cohen, "Blues in the Green: Ecocriticism Under Critique," Environmental History 9:1 (2004). (R)

SOURCE DISCUSSION: Advertisements.

November 29: Suburban Landscapes

Adam Rome, The Bulldozer in the Countryside (entire)

SOURCE DISCUSSION: Maps and GIS.

December 6: Global Scale

J. R. McNeill, Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World (entire).

Paul Sutter, "Reflections: What Can U.S. Environmental Historians Learn from Non-U.S.

Environmental Historiography?" Environmental History, 8:1 (January 2003), 109-29. (R)

J. R. McNeill, "Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History," History and Theory, 42 (December 2003), 5-43. (R)

SOURCE DISCUSSION: Maps and GIS.

December 13: Whither Environmental History?

Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, "Death of Environmentalism," October 2004, plus responses (X)

Adam Rome, ed., "What's Next for Environmental History?" Environmental History 10:1 (January 2005), 30-109.

Adam Rome, "What Really Matters in History? Environmental Perspectives on Modern America," Environmental History 7:2 (April 2002), 303-18. (R)

SOURCE DISCUSSION: Maps and GIS.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: Final paper on the uses of environmental history due in seminar today.

December 18: Final Mandatory Sunday Morning Class Breakfast: Using Environmental History

This begins at 9:00am and runs to about 11:30am, and will be held at my house: 2027 Chadbourne Avenue. You'll find directions above, toward the end of the syllabus.