

History 389:
U.S. Environmental History
Fall 2011

Professor D. Michael Bottoms
MW, 3:00–4:15pm
Office: Robinson B 375B
Office Hours: Mon. 1:30–2:30pm, Wed. 1:30–2:30am (and by appointment)
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Course Description

From their earliest colonial beginnings to the present day, Americans have defined themselves, their sense of national purpose, and even their nation itself in terms of their physical environment. In the eighteenth century, Americans insisted that their dominance over an untamed wilderness would serve as an example to rest of the world of the new nation's moral virtue. Later, the market revolution of the nineteenth century provoked an "ecological revolution" in which Americans recast their natural environment as an endless cornucopia to be exploited and developed. And in the decades following the industrial revolution, Americans again recast the natural world as a fragile space to be conserved, preserved, and protected. Throughout, Americans transformed their national landscape in ways both profound and profane. In tracing these transformations, the course will pursue three goals, or directions. First, we will ask how the natural world and natural resources have historically shaped patterns of American life. Second, we will ask how Americans have given meaning to the world around them, and how those meanings have both governed Americans' relationship with the environment and how they have changed over time. Finally, we will seek to understand how Americans have altered the landscape around them to suit their notions of nature, wilderness, and environment, and the political consequences of those decisions.

Course Requirements:

First Essay:	15%
Second Essay:	15%
Midterm:	20%
Final:	35%
Participation:	15%

Assignments:

Short Papers: There will be two short 5-page essays assigned during the term in which you will be asked to analyze the readings—one will be due prior to the

midterm, and one after. Due dates are clearly marked in the schedule below. Details on the assignments will be handed out in class.

Exams: There will be two exams this semester, a midterm and a final. Both will be essay exams, and both will be take-home exams.

Participation: This course relies on a mixture of lecture and discussion. While attendance at all meetings is, of course, mandatory, *participation* in all discussions is essential to success in the course. The discussions are intended to more fully develop the ideas presented in the course readings and to help you make connections between the readings and lectures. The discussions should not be seen as tests to see if you've done the reading, but rather as opportunities to wrestle with the larger ideas presented in the course. As such, if the discussions are to work in your favor, each of you must come to class not just to answer questions, but to engage in a conversation about the materials presented each week.

Rules for Submission and Formatting:

All papers must use 1-inch margins, and 12-point, Times New Roman font. All written work for this course should be submitted via email attachment to mbottoms@gmu.edu.

Late Policy:

Late papers will be reduced by one-third of a grade for each day after the due date (e.g. from B+ to B to B-) including weekends.

Grading Standards for Writing Assignments:

An "A" essay contains a clearly stated, concise, argumentative, and original thesis supported by relevant evidence. The argument is developed, and carried through, the entire essay and demonstrates the student's ability to independently evaluate the ideas presented in the course. Finally, an "A" essay is polished, i.e. it is free of grammatical or spelling errors, and awkward language.

A "B" essay ably summarizes the materials presented in the course, but typically lacks an original, argumentative, or well-conceived thesis. The essay demonstrates understanding of the course materials, but does not quite rise to the level of creative, independent analysis. A "B" essay is relatively free of grammatical errors.

A "C" essay presents information relevant to the essay topic without any clear organizing principle, or contains significant weaknesses in expression.

An essay that earns a grade lower than "C" generally fails to address the thrust of the assignment, contains numerous grammatical errors, and generally lacks coherence.

Academic Integrity

This class will follow the rules laid down by the George Mason University Honor Code (<http://honorcode.gmu.edu/>). Students who violate that code through academic dishonesty will face a most unforgiving Honor Committee.

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Add/Drop Deadlines

Last Day to Add (Full Semester Course)	September 6, 2011
Last Day to Drop (Full Semester Course)	September 30, 2011
Selective Withdrawal Period	October 3-28, 2011

IN CASE OF INCLEMENT WEATHER

Upon occasion the university is forced to either open late or cancel classes altogether. There are several ways to learn about the status of the university during such times. You may:

- Check the university's main Home Page at www.gmu.edu for updates
- Check your Mason email account for Mason Alerts and for messages from me
- Call the university's main switchboard at 703-993-2474

In rare instances, I may be forced to cancel class for weather related reasons even if the university is open for classes. In such instances, I will send out a group email at least one hour before class begins.

Required Texts:

- William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England, 20th Anniversary Edition*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003).
- Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild*. (New York: Anchor Books, 2007).
- Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. (New York: Harper Perrenial, 2005).
- Paul Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce, Revised Edition: A Declaration of Sustainability*. (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 2010).
- Articles assigned for each week will be available through the course Blackboard page, which can be accessed through the MyMason webpage.

***Note:** This syllabus is a working document and is subject to change. Any and all changes will, of course, be widely and repeatedly advertised.

Lectures and Readings:

Week I: What Is Environmental History?

Mon. 8/29

“Introduction”

Readings:

- None

Wed. 8/31

“What is Environmental History?”

Readings:

- William Cronon, “Kennebec Journey: The Paths Out of Town.” in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America’s Western Past*. William Cronon,, George Miles, Jay Gitlin, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992).
- William Cronon: “The Trouble With Wilderness.” *Environmental History* 1996 1(1):7-28.
- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, pp. 1-7. (available as e-book through Mason Library Catalog)

Week II: Before Columbus

Mon. 9/5

Labor Day—No Class

Readings:

- None

Wed. 9/7

“Indian America”

Readings:

- William Denevan, “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 1992 82(3): 369-385.
- William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 3-33.

Week III: Indian Ecologies and the Columbian Exchange

Mon. 9/12

“Disease”

Readings:

- Alfred W. Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (April 1976): 289-299.
- Adam R. Hodge, "Pestilence and Power: The Smallpox Epidemic of 1780-1782 and Intertribal Relations on the Northern Great Plains." *Historian* Fall 2010 72(3): 543-567.

Wed. 9/14

"The Columbian Exchange"

Readings:

- Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism* (excerpts).

Week IV: From Native Landscapes to Colonial Settlements

Mon. 9/19

"Hunters"

Readings:

- William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 34-107.

Wed. 9/21

"Farmers"

Readings:

- William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 108-170.

FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT HANDED OUT IN CLASS

Week V: Landscapes of the Mind

Mon. 9/26

"Romantics"

Readings:

- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 44-66. (available as e-book through Mason Library Catalog)

Wed. 9/28

"Environmental Nationalism"

Readings:

- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 67-95. (available as e-book through Mason Library Catalog)

Catalog)
FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE BY 2PM

Week VI: Industrial Earth, Urban Earth

Mon. 10/3

“Plains and Farms”

Readings:

- Joyce Appleby, “Commercial Farming and the ‘Agrarian Myth’ in the Early Republic” *Journal of American History* 1982 68(4): 833–849.

Wed. 10/5

“Taming the Waters”

Readings:

- Donald Worster, *Under Western Skies*, 53–63.
- Jeff R. Bremer, “The Trial of the Century: ‘Lux v. Haggin’ and the Conflict Over Water Rights in Late Nineteenth-Century California.” *Southern California Quarterly* June 1999 81(2): 197–220.

Week VII: Landscapes of Death

Tues. 10/11

“The Destruction of the Bison”

Readings:

- Andrew C. Isenberg, “Toward a Policy of Destruction: Buffaloes, Law, and the Market, 1803–83.” *Great Plains Quarterly* 1992 12(4): 227–241.

Wed. 10/12

“Cattle, Fish, and the Tragedy of the Commons”

Readings:

- Arthur F. McEvoy, “Law, Public Policy, and Industrialization in the California Fisheries, 1900–1925.” *The Business History Review* 1983 57(4): 494–521.
- Donald Worster, *Under Western Skies*, 34–52.

TAKE HOME MIDTERM HANDED OUT IN CLASS

Week VIII: Progressive Lands

Mon. 10/17

“Early Conservation”

Readings:

- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 96–140.

Wed. 10/19

“The Wilderness Cult”

Readings:

- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 141–160.

TAKE HOME MIDTERM DUE BY 2PM

Week IX: Progressive Cities

Mon. 10/24

“Cemeteries and the City Beautiful”

Readings:

- Thomas Bender, “The ‘Rural’ Cemetery Movement: Urban Travail and the Appeal of Nature” *The New England Quarterly* 1974 47(2): 196–211.
- Shirley Leckie, “Brand Whitlock and the City Beautiful Movement in Toledo, Ohio.” *Ohio History* 1982 91: 5–36.

Wed. 10/26

“The ‘burbs”

Readings:

- Margaret Marsh, “From Separation to Togetherness: The Social Construction of Domestic Space in American Suburbs, 1840–1915” *The Journal of American History* 1989 76(2): 506–527.

Week X: Environmental Disaster

Mon. 10/31

“The Dust Bowl”

Readings:

- Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 10-43.

Wed. 11/2

“The Flood”

Readings:

- John M. Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America*. (excerpts)

Week XI: Environmental Awakening

Mon. 11/7

“Silent Spring”

Readings:

- Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), pp. 103-152.

Wed. 11/9

“The Fall Out”

Readings:

- Maril Hazlett, “ ‘Woman vs. Man vs. Bugs’ : Gender and Popular Ecology in Early Reactions to *Silent Spring*” *Environmental History* 2004 9(4): 701-729.

SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT HANDED OUT IN CLASS

Week XII: Environmental Activism

Mon. 11/14

“Hippies and Earth Day”

Readings:

- Adam Rome, “Give Earth a Chance: The Environmental Movement and the Sixties” *The Journal of American History* 2003 90(2):267-284.

Wed. 11/16

“The Environmental Middle Class”

Readings:

- Richard White, “Are You An Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking The Human Place in Nature*. Edited by William Cronon. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE BY 2PM

Week XIII: Environmental Romance

Mon. 11/21 "Alexander Supertramp"

Readings:

- Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild*. (all)

Wed. 11/23 Thanksgiving Break—No Class

Readings:

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Week XIV: The New Jungle

Mon. 11/28 "What You See"

Readings:

- Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, chapters 1-4.

Wed. 11/30 "What You Get"

Readings:

- Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, chapters 5-10.

Week XV: Sustainability

Mon. 12/5 "Markets and Natural Capital"

Readings:

- Paul Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce*, ix-xv, 1-64, 103-136.

Wed. 12/7 "Solutions?"

Readings:

- Paul Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce*, 65-102, 137-195.

Final Essay Due: December 14 by 5pm