

Fall 2008
History 6460: Environmental History Seminar

4:30pm-7:00pm Thursdays, Old Main 323-L
Professor Lawrence Culver
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Office: Old Main 321-H
Office Hours: 3:00-4:00, M/W/F; or by appointment.

This graduate seminar is a thematic and chronological introduction to Environmental History as a historical subject and a subject of research. Environmental History is the historical analysis of human societies and their changing relationships with their environment. The readings and weekly discussions are intended to introduce seminar participants to major themes, questions, and debates in Environmental History. This course will have a U.S. focus, but students are welcome to delve into transborder and transnational topics as well.

Seminar Reading List

(Please note that students are not expected to read or purchase every title listed here.)

The following books will be available at the USU Bookstore, and also on reserve at Merrill-Cazier Library:

William de Buys, *Enchantment and Exploitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range*

Karl Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation*

Ari Kellman, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans*

Nancy Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares: The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West*

Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*

Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*

Ted Steinberg, *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disasters in America*

Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*

Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement*

Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place*

Richard White, *The Organic Machine: Remaking the Columbia River*

Additional readings will be available on reserve, electronic reserve, or online:

Course Reserve Address: <http://eres.usu.edu/eres/coursepass.aspx?cid=3893>

Electronic Reserve Password: Cul6460

Rachel Carson, "A Fable for Tomorrow" and "The Obligation to Endure," in *Silent Spring*

William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*

Mike Davis, "The Case for Letting Malibu Burn," in *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*

Maril Hazlett, "Voices from the *Spring: Silent Spring* and the Ecological Turn in American Health," in *Seeing Nature though Gender*

Nancy Langston, "Gender Transformed: Endocrine Disruptors in the Environment," in *Seeing Nature though Gender*

Aldo Leopold, "Wilderness" and "The Land Ethic" in *A Sand County Almanac*

John McPhee, Description of the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake, in *Annals of the Former World*

Jennifer Price, "Looking for Nature at the Mall" in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*

Jennifer Price, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.," in *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles*

Anne Spirn, "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmstead," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*

Wallace Stegner, "A Capsule History of Conservation," in *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs: Living and Writing in the West*

Assignments and Grading:

Leading Class Discussion (15%)

Each seminar participant will be responsible for facilitating class discussion at least once during the course of the semester. That responsibility will involve placing the book and any other weekly readings in their historiographical context, elucidating the author's thesis and major points, analyzing the author's use of sources, and assessing the book's contribution to the literature, as well as its limitations.

Weekly Discussion Questions (15%)

Each participant in the seminar should email at least five substantial discussion questions based on the weekly readings to me by noon on Thursdays before class. We will use these as a means to facilitate our discussions.

Class Participation (15%)

This is a graduate seminar, and its quality and effectiveness will be determined by the contribution each participant makes to the class. Regular attendance and informed participation in our weekly conversations are essential for a good participation grade.

Three Book Review Papers (10% Each – 30% Total)

Each of these 2 to 4 page papers should be a substantive review of a book assigned for this seminar (and any other class readings assigned for that week). One of these review papers will be based on the readings for the week you lead class discussion. You can choose the other two books and any associated weekly readings you wish to review. Rather than simply summarizing the book, your review should state the author's thesis and major points, examine their use of sources, and offer your critique of the book's strengths and weaknesses. Book reviews are due in class the week following our discussion of that book.

Final Course Assignment (25%)

This final assignment can take various forms based upon your needs and disciplinary focus. Each assignment, however, should represent a substantial amount of research and writing, and should include a bibliography.

Possible options include:

Comparative Historiographical Review Essay

For this 15 to 18-page paper, you will select approximately five books (a series of scholarly journal articles can be substituted for one of the books) which are connected thematically, addressing a specific, discrete, topic within Environmental History of interest to you. Examples might include the environmental history of a significant national park, city, region, environmental conflict, or historical turning point. Two of the books can be titles we have discussed in class. You should discuss possible books or articles with me well in advance of the final paper's due date. As in your book review papers, your paper should summarize and critique each book, but should analyze them comparatively, considering how each approaches the subject or theme and contributes to your understanding of it.

Historiographical Literature Review Essay

For this 15 to 18-page paper, you will select a sizable number of books, perhaps 10 to 15, separately or in combination with a number of journal articles, which collectively examine a broad topic within Environmental History. Up to three of the books can be titles we have discussed in class. Possible subjects might include "U.S. Environmental History since 1950," "Urban Environmental History," "U.S. National Forests and Forest Policy," or "U.S. Environmentalism and Environmental Movements since World War II." Your essay should examine each book or article within a broader context, mapping out relationships between them by exploring trends or debates in the subject area they examine, or how historical analysis of the subject has changed over time.

M.A. Thesis or Plan B Chapter or Paper

If your research topic has an environmental history or environmental studies component, you can write a thesis or plan B chapter based on primary and secondary research as the final assignment in this seminar.

Each student will do a short presentation on their final project at our final seminar meeting, and turn in their projects by Monday, December 8th.

Seminar Schedule

August 28th, Week One: Introduction to Seminar

**September 4th, Week Two:
Surveying the Terrain: Essays and Artifacts in Environmental and Historical Thought**
Recounting and Questioning Traditional Conservation: Preserving Places
Wallace Stegner, "A Capsule History of Conservation," in *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs: Living and Writing in the West* (1992) [Optional Reading]

Aldo Leopold, "Wilderness" and "The Land Ethic" in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949)
William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1996)
New Environmental Frontiers: Protecting Us from Pollution, Outside and In:
Rachel Carson, "A Fable for Tomorrow" and "The Obligation to Endure," in *Silent Spring* (1962)
Maril Hazlett, "Voices from the Spring: *Silent Spring* and the Ecological Turn in American Health," in *Seeing Nature through Gender* (2003) [Optional Reading]
Nancy Langston, "Gender Transformed: Endocrine Disruptors in the Environment," in *Seeing Nature through Gender* (2003)
Finding Nature in Consumption and Culture:
Jennifer Price, "Looking for Nature at the Mall" in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1996)

September 11th, Week Three:

The History of "Nature's Nation"

Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*

September 18th, Week Four:

Nature and Society over Time in One Region

William de Buys, *Enchantment and Exploitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range*

September 25th, Week Five:

Conserving Nature and Causing Conflict

Karl Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation*

October 2nd, Week Six:

(Mis)Managing Nature:

Nancy Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares: The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West*

October 9th, Week Seven:

Remaking Nature

Richard White, *The Organic Machine: Remaking the Columbia River Cadillac Desert*, Episode 1: "Mulholland's Dream" (Video)

October 16th, Week Eight:

Placing the City in Nature, and Locating Nature in the City

Ari Kellman, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans*

Anne Spirn, "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmstead," *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1996)

-- OR --

Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place*
Jennifer Price, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.," *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles* (2005) [Also available online:
http://www.believmag.com/issues/200604/?read=article_price]

October 23rd

Week Nine: No Class. Western History Association Annual Conference in Salt Lake City.
Preliminary final project proposal and bibliography due via email.

October 30th

Week Ten:

Energizing Environmentalism

Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*

--OR--

Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement*

November 6th

Week Eleven:

(Un)Natural Disasters

Ted Steinberg, *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disasters in America*

Mike Davis, "The Case for Letting Malibu Burn," *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (1998)

John McPhee, Description of the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake, in *Annals of the Former World* (1998)

Final project proposals due.

November 13th

Week Twelve:

The Nature of Food and Food Production

Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*

November 20th

Week Thirteen: No Class. Work on Papers.

November 27th

Week Fourteen: No Class -- Thanksgiving.

December 4th

Week Fifteen: Final Presentations

Monday, December 8th: Final projects due.

This syllabus and class schedule may be revised. If so, an updated version will be available on my faculty website: <http://www.usu.edu/history/faculty/culver/classesculver.htm>