

History 691/791E: American Environmental History

Spring 2004
Herter 208

D. Glassberg
Herter 616, 545-1330
Tu/Th 1:30-3:30 & by appt.
glassberg@history.umass.edu

This course offers an introduction, at the graduate level, to the various theoretical approaches and primary sources used to study the history of the interaction of humans with the natural environment of North America since European settlement. We will explore four interrelated themes over time, examining how Americans: 1) interacted with natural processes (such as floods, drought, fire, disease, insects); 2) used natural resources (such as soil, water, timber, minerals); 3) made public policy (parks and conservation, city planning, antipollution laws); 4) thought about “nature” (changing ideas as reflected in art, religion, literature, science). Our fundamental premise is that how Americans have acted to shape their environment over the past four centuries has been a consequence of their ideas and perceptions of it.

Course Requirements: You will be expected to participate actively in class discussions of the common readings. In addition, you will be expected to lead two class discussions over the course of the semester, doing the extra reading necessary to place the week’s reading into historiographical context for your classmates. A brief (8-10 pg) paper is due one week after each of your oral presentations. You will also be expected to write a longer (10-15 pg) final paper on a topic of your choice. This may be either a review essay on some aspect of the field that you want to explore further, or a prospectus for an original research paper to be completed during the summer.

Books: available for purchase at Amherst Books, 8 Main Street, Amherst, MA:

W. Cronon, ed. Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature
T. Steinberg, Down to Earth: Nature’s Role in American History
W. Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England
R. Judd, Common Lands, Common People: The Origins of Conservation in Northern New England
R. Sellars, Preserving Nature in the National Parks
D. Worster, Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s
A. Leopold, A Sand County Almanac
G. Markowitz & D. Rosner, Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution
D. Davis, When Smoke Ran Like Water: Tales of Environmental Deception and the Battle Against Pollution

Most of the required readings are on electronic reserve. The password for the course is “nature.” In addition, the library also has a complete run of the journal Environmental History and its predecessor, Environmental History Review, an excellent source of articles and review essays on various topics. Finally, I have an environmental history website that contains a number of useful links; its current address is <http://www-unix.oit.umass.edu/~hist383>.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

2/3 Introduction: Defining the Field

D. Worster, “Transformations of the Earth: Toward an Agroecological Perspective in History,” and W. Cronon, “Modes of Prophecy and Production: Placing Nature in History,” Journal of American History 76 (March 1990): 1087-1106, 1122-31. (Excerpts in C. Merchant, ed. Major Problems in American Environmental History, pp. 1-14).
D. Worster, “The Vulnerable Earth,” and “Doing Environmental History,” in Ends of the Earth, pp. 3-20, 289-307.
*W. Cronon, “The Uses of Environmental History,” Environmental History Review 17 (Fall 1993): 1-22.
R. White, “American Environmental History: The Development of a New Historical Field,” Pacific Historical Review 54 (1985):297-335.

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2/10: Native American vs. European Landscapes

W. Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England

*A. Crosby, "Ecological Imperialism: The Overseas Migration of Western Europeans as a Biological Phenomenon," Texas Quarterly 21 (Spring 1978): 10-22.

C. Merchant, Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England, pp. 1-145.

J. Merrell, The Indians' New World, ch 1

R. Gutierrez, When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away, ch. 1

T. Silver, A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonists, and Slaves in South Atlantic Forests, 1500-1800

2/17 Subsistence vs. the Marketplace

*H. Raup, "The View from John Sanderson's Farm: A Perspective for the Use of the Land," Forest History 10 (April 1966): 2-11.

N. Lamoreaux, "Rethinking the Transition to Capitalism in Early New England," Journal of American History 90 (Sept 2003): 437-61.

C. Merchant, Ecological Revolutions, pp. 149-270

J. O'Keefe & D. Foster, "Ecological History of Massachusetts Forests," in C. Foster, ed. Stepping Back to Look Forward: A History of the Massachusetts Forest (1998), pp. 19-66.

S. Stoll, Larding the Lean Earth

G. Nobles, "Commerce and Community: A Case Study of the Rural Broommaking Business in Antebellum Massachusetts," Journal of the Early Republic 4 (Fall 1984): 287-308.

J. Cantor & A. Baker, "Views of Rural New England, 1790-1865," in P. Benes, ed. The Farm, pp. 126-47.

R. St. George, "Artifacts of Regional Consciousness in the Connecticut River Valley, 1700-80," in Material Life in America, pp. 335-56.

D. Upton, "White & Black Landscapes in 18th Century Virginia," in St. George, ed. Material Life in America, pp. 357-69.

J. Stilgoe, Common Landscape of America, 1580-1845

2/24 Industrialization as Environmental Revolution

T. Steinberg, Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Waters of New England

J. Cumbler, Reasonable Use

G. Kulick, "Dams, Fish, and Farmers: The Defense of Public Rights in 18C Rhode Island," in H. Gutman & D. Bell, eds. New England Working Class & the New Labor History (1987), pp. 187-213.

J. Cumbler, "What Ever Happened to Industrial Waste? Reform, Compromise, and Science in 19C Southern New England," Journal of Social History 29 (Fall 1995): 149-71.

3/2 Picturing Nature

R. Williams, "Ideas of Nature," [1972] in Problems in Materialism & Culture: Selected Essays (1980), pp. 67-85.

J. Sears, Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the 19th Century, ch 1-4.

A. Miller, Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-75

B. Novack, Nature and Culture: American Landscape Painting, 1825-75

J. Wilmerding, ed. American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850-75

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M. Heiman, "Production Confronts Consumption: Landscape Perception and Social Conflict in the Hudson Valley," Environment & Planning D: Society & Space 7 (1989): 165-73.
(Reprinted in Merchant, Major Problems, pp. 191-98.

3/9 The West

*F.J. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," American Historical Association Annual Report for 1893, pp. 199-227.

P. Limerick, "Disorientation and Reorientation: The American Landscape Discovered from the West," Journal of American History (Dec 1992): 1021-49.

W. Cronon, Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West

D. Worster, Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West

M. Steiner, "From Frontier to Region: Frederick Jackson Turner and the New Western History," Pacific Historical Review 64 (Nov 1995): 479-501.

J. Sears, Sacred Places, ch. 6-7

S. Pyne, How the Canyon Became Grand: A Short History (1998)

P. Hales, William Henry Jackson and the Transformation of the American Landscape

W. Goetzmann, The West of the Imagination

M. Sandweiss, "Views and Reviews: Western Art & Western History," in W. Cronon, ed. Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past, pp. 185-202.

3/16 No class (Spring Break)

3/23 National Parks

R. Sellars, Preserving Nature in the National Parks

W. Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" in Uncommon Ground, pp. 69-90.

J. Sears, Sacred Places, ch. 6-7

M. Spence, "Dispossessing the Wilderness: Yosemite Indians and the National Park Ideal, 1864-1930," Pacific Historical Review 65 (Feb 1996): 27-59.

3/30 Conservation

R. Judd, Common Lands, Common People: The Origins of Conservation in Northern New England (1997).

D. Lowenthal, George Perkins Marsh

R. McCullough, The Landscape of Community: A History of Communal Forests in New England (1995), ch 6.

*G. Pinchot, "Prosperity," and "Principles of Conservation," in The Fight for Conservation (1910), pp. 3-20, 40-52

*J. Muir, "Hetch Hetchy Valley," in The Yosemite (1912), pp. 249-62

C. Koppes, "Efficiency, Equity, Aesthetics: Shifting Themes in American Conservation," in Worster, Ends of the Earth, pp. 230-51.

C. Miller, "The Greening of Gifford Pinchot," Environmental History Review 16 (Fall 1992): 1-20.

S. Hays, Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency

S. Schrepfer, The Fight to Save the Redwoods

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4/6 City Parks and Suburbs

- A. Spirn, "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted," in Cronon, ed. Uncommon Ground, pp. 91-113.
- J. Sears, Sacred Places, ch. 5.
- *R. Rosenzweig, "Middle-Class Parks and Working-Class Play: The Struggle Over Recreational Space in Worcester, MA, 1870-1910," Radical History Review 21 (Fall 1979): 31-48.
- D. Schuyler, The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth Century America (1986)
- R. Rosenzweig & E. Blackmar, The Park & The People: A History of Central Park
- R. McCullough, The Landscape of Community: A History of Communal Forests in New England (1995), ch 7.
- C. Clark, "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History: The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in America, 1840-70," in St. George, Material Life in America, pp. 535-49.

4/13 Regional Planning

- D. Worster, Dust Bowl
- B. MacKaye, The New Exploration: A Philosophy of Regional Planning (1928)
- R. McCullough, The Landscape of Community: A History of Communal Forests in New England (1995), ch 4, 8.
- M. Steiner, "Regionalism in the Great Depression," Geographical Review 73 (1983): 430-46.
- J. Hancock, "The New Deal and American Planning," in D. Schaffer, ed. Two Centuries of American Planning, pp. 197-230.
- P. Cutler, The Public Landscape of the New Deal
- R. Dorman, Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America 1920-45

4/20 Inventing Ecology

- A. Leopold, A Sand County Almanac
- M. Barbour, "Ecological Fragmentation in the Fifties," in Uncommon Ground, pp. 233-55.
- D. Worster, Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas, ch. 11, 13
- D. Worster, "Ecology of Order & Chaos," Environmental History Review 14 (Spring 1990): 4-16. (Reprinted in Merchant, Major Problems, pp. 465-79).

4/27 Post World War II Landscape

- J. Kunstler, The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape
- *Michael Pollan, "Two Gardens," and "Why Mow?" from Second Nature: A Gardener's Education (1991), pp. 9-26, 65-78.
- R. Fishman, "The Post-War American Suburb," in D. Schaffer, ed. Two Centuries of American Planning, pp. 265-78.
- K. Jackson, The Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the U.S., ch. 10-14
- M. Sorkin, ed. Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space

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5/4 Modern Environmentalism and Environmental Justice

G. Markowitz & D. Rosner, Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution OR
D. Davis, When Smoke Ran Like Water: Tales of Environmental Deception and the Battle Against Poll

A. Hurley, Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-80

S. Hays, "From Conservation to Environment," in Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the U.S., pp. 13-39.

R. Gottlieb, Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement

C. Sellers, Hazards of the Job: From Industrial Disease to Environmental Health Science (1997)

R. Paehlke, Environmentalism and the Future of Progressive Politics

*R. Carson, "The Obligation to Endure," in Silent Spring, pp. 5-13.

*B. Commoner, "The Technological Flaw," in The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, & Technology [1971], pp. 138-56, 173-75..

5/11 Discussion of final papers

5/18 Final Papers Due

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Third Paper, due Tues 5/18, with topic identified by Tuesday 4/6 and short oral presentation in class on Wednesday 5/11:

There are two options:

1) Write a third review essay on some aspect of environmental history that you want to explore further. This is similar in format and length (approximately 10 pages) to your first two papers. You may choose to review a book about a contemporary environmental issue and place it in historical perspective, or examine a past issue and historians' different interpretations of it. To stimulate some ideas, here is a list of books on contemporary environmental issues (in addition to the ones on the course syllabus).

- Alston Chase, In a Dark Wood: The Fight Over Forests (1995)
Alston Chase, Playing God in Yellowstone: Destruction of America's First National Park (1986)
Theo Colborn, Our Stolen Future: How We Are Threatening Our Fertility, Intelligence, & Survival (1996)
Jan Dizard, Going Wild: Hunting, Animal Rights, and the Contested Meaning of Nature (1994)
Robert Bullard, Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality (1990)
Al Gore, Earth in the Balance (1992)
Bill McKibben, The End of Nature (1989)
Bill McKibben, Hope, Human and Wild: True Stories of Living Lightly on Earth (1995)
Julian Simon and Herman Kahn, The Resourceful Earth (1984)
Gregg Easterbrook, A Moment on Earth: Coming Age of Environmental Optimism (1995)
Dixie Lee Ray, Environmental Overkill: Whatever Happened to Common Sense? (1994)
Rachel Carson, Silent Spring (1962)
Paul Ehrlich, The Population Bomb (1968)
Paul Ehrlich, Cassandra Conference (1988)
Barry Commoner, The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, & Technology (1971)
Barry Commoner, Making Peace with the Planet (1990)
Lester Brown, Building a Sustainable Society (1981)
Lester Brown, ed. State of the World (any year)
Kirkpatrick Sale, Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision (1985)
Carolyn Merchant, Earthcare: Women and the Environment (1996)
Carolyn Merchant, Radical Ecology: Search for a Livable World (1992)
Roderick Nash, The Rights of Nature (1989)
John Firor, The Changing Atmosphere (1990)
Henry Kanski, Saving the Hidden Treasure: The Evolution of Groundwater Policy (1990)
Amory Lovins, Soft Energy Paths (1977)
Michael Brown, Laying Waste: Poisoning of America by Toxic Chemicals (1979)
Laurie Mott & Karen Snyder, Pesticide Alert (1987)
Marc Reisner, Cadillac Desert: American West and its Disappearing Water (1986)

2) : Prepare a prospectus for an original research paper to be completed during Spring semester.

(see other side for guidelines on preparing a research paper prospectus)

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Preparing a research paper prospectus

Writing a research paper is an ambitious goal. You can achieve it by working steadily, breaking the large job down into its component parts. Rather than doing all of your research first, then writing, you can literally build your paper up, section by section. A good prospectus can form as much as the first third of your paper and help you to outline the rest. So please take this assignment seriously.

Typically, the prospectus consists of four parts:

- 1) An initial statement of the historical question that you want to explore. Arrange this discussion from the general to the more specific. For example, you may be interested in environmental changes that accompanied the development of the automobile in the 1920s. One way to explore this large question is by focusing on a particular place, such as Springfield. As you discover what primary sources are available, you may be able to narrow your question even further; for example, if you discover the scrapbooks of an African-American motoring club in Springfield are at the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, you might decide to write about the impact of the automobile on African-American families.
- 2) A discussion of what you have read about the question thusfar, based on secondary works. For example, you would discuss other studies of the environmental impact of the automobile; as you read more secondary works, this section will expand.
- 3) A discussion of what primary sources you will examine to explore the question. Mention where these sources are located, how extensive they are, and how specifically you expect that they will help you to answer the question.
- 4) A bibliography listing what you have already read and what you plan to examine in the future. As you do more research this section will expand, so that by the end of the semester your final bibliography will already be done.

I anticipate that all four parts of your prospectus will be approximately 15 pages, though you may make your prospectus as long as you want. Keep in mind that you will be presenting a preliminary version of this to the rest of the class, so the more you can show early on, the more we can help you.