

# HIST3160 - American Environmental History

University of Georgia, Fall 2009

**T-Th 9:30-10:45 a.m.**  
**230 LeConte Hall**

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*\*\*The course syllabus is a general plan for the course, not a contract; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary\*\**

**Course Description:** Welcome to HIST3160: American Environmental History. You might be wondering: what exactly *is* environmental history? In a nutshell, **environmental history is the study of the interaction between humans and nonhuman nature over time.** Ecologists tell us that all things in nature are linked together. Inspired by this idea, environmental historians argue that history is about more than just “human things” like politics or war or racial conflicts. History has also been shaped by the intimate relationship between the human and nonhuman worlds. Plants, animals, microorganisms, climate, geography, and so on have all influenced human culture. People have returned the favor by affecting nature as well. Meanwhile, humans have also thought, spoken, and written about the natural world, and their relationship to it, in philosophy, religion, art, science and politics, to name only the major venues.

This class is a broad, survey-level introduction to this interaction as it occurred in North America since the last Ice Age. It is not meant to be an exhaustive, comprehensive class in which you will be taught everything you will ever need to know about environmental history. Instead, this class is intended to introduce to you and help you to explore some vital issues and themes in the discipline. Over the next semester we will discuss topics as diverse as the impact of smallpox on native culture, the fate of horse dung in Gilded-Age New York, and the role of the bulldozer in the creation of modern environmentalism. We will range across the United States, from Northeast to Southwest, and across time from the Ice Age to the Reagan era, with forays into Central America and Canada. In the process we will also touch on a wide spectrum of historical approaches: social history, labor history, political and policy history, women’s history, and more – not to mention biology, ecology, anthropology, and a number of other interdisciplinary influences. We’ll approach them through a mixture of lectures, (lots of) readings and discussion, journal entries, and a paper.

**Readings:** The main text for this semester will be Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature’s Role in American History 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. We will read three other books as well: William Cronon’s *Changes in the Land*, Donald Worster’s *Dust Bowl*, and Andrew Hurley’s *Environmental Inequalities*. Most of the readings, however, can be found either **online** at the addresses provided, or in the **coursepack** (henceforth designated [CP]), available at Bel-Jean’s on Broad Street (across from and a little to the west of the Arch).

**Grades:** The grade breakdown is as follows:

- \* **Readings Journals** – 60 percent (4 entries @ 15 percent each)
- \* **Term paper** – 30 percent
- \* **Attendance** – 5 percent
- \* **Discussion Participation** – 5 percent

**Class Structure:** This semester we meet two days a week – Tuesdays and Thursdays – for 1 hour and 15 minutes at a time. Generally, Tuesdays will be “lecture” days, and Thursdays will be part lecture and part discussion – after I lecture, we will change gears and talk about the week’s readings for 30-45 minutes. Meanwhile, interspersed with lectures will be a number of films, which may or may not take up an entire class period.

**GENERAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS:** I expect all students to attend \*all\* classes, to take good notes, to read the assigned readings in their entirety, to turn in all written assignments when they are due, to arrive promptly for tests, etc.

**Attendance and excused absences:** Your attendance grade will be calculated by dividing the number of classes you attended by the total number of classes. Excused absences **will rarely be given**, and when they are, it will be on a case-by-case basis only. Specific excuses will **require considerable written evidence** to support them, i.e. doctors’ notes, University permission letters, obituaries, and the like. I cannot excuse absences for work, vacation plans, non-varsity sports, over-sleeping, and so on.

**Participation in Discussions:** It is important that you participate enthusiastically and regularly in class discussions. **Five percent – half a letter-grade - of your class grade depends on your active engagement in classroom conversations – and I will be keeping track. It will be hard to get an A or A-minus without talking regularly!** If you’re shy or petrified of speaking in public, now is the time to conquer your fears. If you don’t speak at all, or only rarely, you will likely receive a ZERO as a discussion grade, or a best a very low score.

**Reading Load:** the reading load **\*\*will be heavy\*\*** and, as mentioned above, you are expected to read all assigned readings, and come to class **prepared to discuss them on Thursdays**. Look ahead in the syllabus and **plan ahead** – know how much you have to read and when you have to be done, and adjust accordingly.

**Readings Analysis and Research Paper:** We will have four “readings analysis” papers and a research paper due near the end of the semester.

**Readings Analysis:** Over the semester you’ll write four (4) “readings analysis” papers of approximately five (5) pages, in which you will think about, critiques, analyze, and comment **in detail** on the readings contained in a two-to-three-week “bloc” prior to the due date. There are six total “blocs” in the class, ending on August 27, September 17, October 1, October 22, November 5, and December 3 respectively. You will turn in an analysis paper on any FOUR (4) of those dates – which four dates you choose will be up to you. Extensive footnotes are not necessary, although if you make reference to or quote from material from either inside or outside sources I would appreciate an in-text citation. **Thoughtful commentary, nuanced analysis and critique** and **quality writing** are expected – these analyses form the major part of your grade, so write accordingly! I will provide more information about the analysis papers shortly after the semester begins.

**Research paper:** You’ll read about and discuss many topics in American environmental history in this class, and you will likely discover some place, person or group of people, or issue that particularly interests you. For the paper you will write a 6-8 page environmental history of your particular interest. The paper doesn’t have to be the “final word” on your topic, but it should address the major writings (both current and past) about it and any complex issues and controversies surrounding it. Careful selection of your topic will be necessary – make sure you are neither too narrow nor too broad in your view. In the near

future I will provide more detailed information about the paper. It will be due on **December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009**.

**\*\*Late Papers:** Late papers will be lowered in grade by **10 percent for every day late, beginning immediately after the class period in which they are due**, i.e. a paper turned in between one minute and one day late will be docked 10 percent, a paper turned in the 24-48 hours late will be docked 20 percent, and so on.

**GRADING STANDARDS:** Grading standards in this class are simple. With modern word-processing programs, spell-check, etc, there is little excuse for papers filled with grammatical errors or ones that fail to meet the minimum required length. A typical “C” paper, exam, or essay has few or none of these kinds of weaknesses. On the other hand, while it may be technically solid, typical “C” work does not show much distinction in clarity of argument, creativity, or originality of insight. It may be repetitive or rambling, or obvious, or it may simply have no real thesis or “point” to it. It may not support its arguments sufficiently or it may fail to address important issues. Severe problems along these lines will result in grades of “D” or “F.” On the other hand, a “B” paper or essay shows a good grasp of reading and lecture material, some creativity and “fresh thinking,” and uses good evidence and examples from both lectures and readings. It is well-organized, too. *An “A” paper or essay demonstrates deep, penetrating insight and unusually good verbal facility. It is the work of someone who has thought long and hard about the issues, grappled with them, pulled together diverse strands of evidence into a convincing argument, and in general has achieved a truly impressive level of coherence, clarity, and critical thinking.* Grading standards for tests are essentially the same as for papers, although I am not as concerned about tight organization or spelling. I understand the time pressures involved in an in-class exam. However, “A” exams will still be expected to achieve a level of coherence and analysis far above a typical “C” exam.

**THE 24-HOUR/TWO-WEEK RULE:** Students sometimes come up to me with fire in their eyes after I have handed back their exams, angry or upset with their grade and anxious to change immediately. I am a slow and serious grader, and I have definite reasons for the grades I give. Therefore, I have a **24-hour “waiting period”** after handing back graded items, during which I will not entertain questions about grades, giving you the opportunity to think about my comments and corrections. Once that 24-hour period is up, I encourage questions, though you must make an appointment with me to discuss your questions in my office (I don’t discuss them in public, for obvious reasons). I encourage you to have precise questions and reasons for requesting any grade changes. Please be forewarned, however, **that I have little patience for “point grubbing” of any kind**, i.e. whining, pleading, groveling, cajoling, arguing, bullying, shouting, or otherwise pressuring me in an attempt to get a better grade. Finally, **I will no longer reconsider the grade** on any test, paper, journal, or other assignment which has been “handed back” **for more than two weeks**.

*\*\*\*All academic work must meet the standards contained in "A Culture of Honesty," [http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/culture\\_honesty.htm](http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/culture_honesty.htm). Each student is responsible to inform themselves about those standards before performing any academic work.\*\*\**

Finally, let me offer a few words on **PLAGIARISM**. In this class we will adhere to UGA’s University Honor Code and Academic Honesty Policy. Plagiarism – **the attempt to pass off another’s written work, from any source, as your own, without adequate reference or citation** — is strictly forbidden. Cheating on exams is forbidden as well. *If I discover a student in an act of plagiarism or cheating, I WILL initiate procedures to charge him or her with academic misconduct (indeed, UGA regulations require it), and there is a serious possibility that I will recommend to the University that the student receive a zero in the entire course. I hate to sound vindictive, but plagiarism and cheating as are serious matters and I will not tolerate them.*

Okay, everything clear as mud? Well, away we go.....

WEEK ONE – August 18-20, 2009

**Rethinking History in the Age of Ecology, and the Myth of the Ecological Indian**

- Readings: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, Prologue, “Rock and History,” pp. 3-7, and Chapter 1, “Wilderness Under Fire,” pp. 11-21  
Donald Worster, “Paths Across the Levee,” from *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 16-29 [CP]  
Shepard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), pp.101-22 [CP]

WEEK TWO – August 25-27, 2009

**Errand into the Wilderness:** Europeans and the “New World,” and the Ecology of “Virgin Soil”

- Readings: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, Chapter 2, “A Truly New World,” pp. 21-38  
Roderick Nash, “A Wilderness Condition,” from *Wilderness and the American Mind* 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 23-43 [CP]  
Alfred Crosby, “Conquistador y Pestilencia,” from *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Greenwood, CT: Westport Press, 1972), pp. 35-59 [CP]

**READINGS ANALYSIS due on 8/27/09**

WEEK THREE – September 1-3, 2009

**A World of Fields and Fences:** Nature and Colonists

- Readings: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, Chapter 3, “Reflections from a Woodlot,” pp. 39-54  
William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), *entire*.

WEEK FOUR – September 8-10, 2009

**Marketing Nature:** Capitalism, the Industrial Revolution, and Making Nature into a Thing

- Readings: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, Chapters 4 and 5, “A World of Commodities” and “King Climate in Dixie,” pp. 55-88  
Mart Stewart, “Rice, Water and Power: Landscapes of Domination and Resistance in the Lowcountry, 1790-1880,” *Environmental History Review* 15 (Autumn 1991): 47-64, available from [http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=1053-4180\(199101\)15:3%3C47:RWAPLO%3E2.0.CO;2-#&origin=sfx%3Asfx](http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=1053-4180(199101)15:3%3C47:RWAPLO%3E2.0.CO;2-#&origin=sfx%3Asfx)

WEEK FIVE – September 15-17, 2009

**War Upon the Land:** Nature in the Civil War and After

- Readings: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, Chapters 6 and 7, “The Great Food Fight” and “Extracting the New South,” pp. 89-115  
Mark Hersey, “Hints and Suggestions to Farmers: George Washington Carver and Rural Conservation in the South,” *Environmental History* 11 (April 2006): 239-268, available from <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/eh/11.2/hersey.html>

**READINGS ANALYSIS due on 9/17/09**

WEEK SIX – September 22-24, 2009

**Chicago:** Turning Timber, Grain, and Topsoil into Economic Empire

- Readings: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, Chapter 8, “The Unforgiving West,” pp. 116-35  
William Cronon, “Annihilating Space: Meat,” from *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), pp. 207-259 [CP]

WEEK SEVEN – September 29-October 1, 2009

**The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number:** The Rise of “Conservation” and “Preservation”

- Readings: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, Chapter 9, “Conservation Reconsidered,” pp. 136-154  
Roderick Nash, “Hetch Hetchy,” from *Wilderness and the American Mind*, pp. 161-181 [CP]  
Adam Rome, “Nature Wars, Culture Wars: Immigration and Environmental Reform in the Progressive Era,” *Environmental History* (July 2008), available from <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/eh/13.3/rome.html>

**READINGS ANALYSIS due on 10/1/09**

WEEK EIGHT – October 6, 2009 **NO CLASS on October 8 – Fall Break**

**The Urban Jungles:** Environmental Health and Nature in the City

- Reading: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, Chapter 10, “Death of the Organic City,” pp. 155-174  
Robert Gottlieb, “Reconstructing Environmentalism: Complex Movements, Diverse Roots,” *Environmental History Review* 17 (Winter 1993): 1-19, available from [http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=1053-4180\(199301\)17:4%3C1:RECMDR%3E2.0.CO;2-#&origin=sfx%3Asfx](http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=1053-4180(199301)17:4%3C1:RECMDR%3E2.0.CO;2-#&origin=sfx%3Asfx)  
Joel Tarr, “Searching for a ‘Sink’ for an Industrial Waste,” *Environmental History Review* 18 (Spring 1994): 9-43, available from [http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=1053-4180\(199401\)18:1%3C9:SFA%27FA%3E2.0.CO;2-#&origin=sfx%3Asf](http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=1053-4180(199401)18:1%3C9:SFA%27FA%3E2.0.CO;2-#&origin=sfx%3Asf)

WEEK NINE – October 13-15, 2009

**Extraction Redux:** Industrialized Farming and Its Discontents

- Readings: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, Chapters 11 and 12, “Moveable Feast” and “The Secret History of Meat,” pp. 175-205  
Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (Oxford University Press, 1979), *entire*.

WEEK TEN – October 20-22, 2009

**Consuming Nature:** Suburban Sprawl, the Automobile, and the Middle-Class Life

- Readings: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, Chapters 13 and 14, “America in Black and Green” and “Throwaway Society,” pp. 206-225  
Edward Abbey, “Polemic: Industrial Tourism and the National Parks,” from *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (New York: Ballantine, 1968), pp. 45-67 [CP]

**READINGS ANALYSIS due on 10/22/09**

WEEK ELEVEN – October 27-29, 2009

**Green Sun Rising:** The Rise of Postwar Environmentalism

- Readings: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, Chapter 15, “Shades of Green,” pp. 239-61  
Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” from *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 201-26, available at [http://www.luminary.us/leopold/land\\_ethic.html](http://www.luminary.us/leopold/land_ethic.html)  
Rachel Carson, “The Human Price” and “Through a Narrow Window,” in *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), pp. 187-216 [CP]  
Brian Allen Drake, “The Silent Spring and the Poisoned Well: Water Fluoridation, Conservatism, and Environmentalism after World War II,” unpublished manuscript, *entire* [CP]  
Adam Rome, “Open Space: The First Protests against the Bulldozed Landscape,” from *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 119-52 [CP]

WEEK TWELVE – November 3-5, 2009

**Wilderness Forever:** The Wilderness Act, and the Great Dam Battles and National Park Controversies of the 1950s and 60s

- Readings: “The Wilderness Act of 1964,” available from <http://www.wilderness.net/index.cfm?fuse=NWPS&sec=legisact>  
Roderick Nash, “Decisions for Permanence,” from *Wilderness and the American Mind*, pp. 200-237 [CP]  
William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness, Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” *Environmental History* 1 (January 1996): 7-28, available at [http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=1084-5453\(199601\)1:1%3C7:TTWVOG%3E2.0.CO;2-#&origin=sfx%3Asfx](http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=1084-5453(199601)1:1%3C7:TTWVOG%3E2.0.CO;2-#&origin=sfx%3Asfx)

Donald Worster, "The Wilderness of History," *Wild Earth* 7 (Fall 1997): 9-13, available at <http://www.religionandnature.com/bron/courses/readings/Worster--WildernessHistory.pdf>

**READINGS ANALYSIS due on 11/5/09**

WEEK THIRTEEN – November 10-12

**Green Government: The Birth of the Environmental State**

- Readings: Richard Nixon's *State of the Union* address, January 20, 1970, available at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1387>  
*The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969*, available at <http://www.nepa.gov/nepa/regs/nepa/nepaeqia.htm>

WEEK FOURTEEN – November 17-19, 2009

**Environmental Justice, Social Justice: the Postwar Urban Environment**

- Readings: Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana 1945-80* (University of North Carolina Press, 1995), *entire*

**\*\*\*\*\* Thanksgiving Break, November 23-27, 2009\*\*\*\*\***

WEEK FIFTEEN – December 1-3, 2009

**The Anti-Environmental Backlash, and Wither the Future?**

- Readings: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, Chapter 16, "In Corporations We Trust," pp. 262-81  
Jennifer Price, "Looking for Nature at the Mall: A Field Guide to the Nature Company"  
from William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), pp. 186-203 [CP]

**READINGS ANALYSIS due on 12/3/09**

**\*\*\*Paper due in class on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009\*\*\***