HSTAA 221/ENVIR 221: Environmental History of the United States

Autumn 2015

Mondays & Wednesdays 10:30-12:20

[https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/989105]
[http://faculty.washington.edu/lnash/221/221_home.htm]

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Course Description and Learning Goals

In this class, we move beyond traditional historical frameworks that consider only human actions and human society to ask how the history of North America has been a product of both human actions and natural environments. We will consider how American politics, society, and culture have been connected to the history of disease, plants, animals, rivers, and air. Lectures and readings will survey how specific environments have shaped and been shaped by Native American societies, European colonization, American imperial expansion, agricultural modernization, urbanization, and twentieth-century consumerism. We will also study how "nature" has been defined and represented in American culture at different moments (e.g., in landscape painting, National Parks, and Disney films), and debate what difference those representations have made. Finally we will consider how and why the modern environmental movement emerged in the decades after World War II, why it took the particular shape that it did, and whose interests it has represented. In addition, students will learn (1) what it means to think historically about place, nature, and environment; (2) how to critically read, analyze, and evaluate both primary historical sources and secondary articles and monographs; (3) how to efficiently locate and evaluate different kinds of historical evidence; (4) how to write a persuasive historical essay; and (5) techniques for improving and revising formal prose.

Universal Learning

I am committed to the principle of universal learning. This means that the professor and teaching assistants will strive to make the classroom and its virtual spaces as inclusive as possible and that we will expect students to do the same. Mutual respect, civility, and the ability to listen and observe others carefully are crucial to universal learning. If you have any suggestions as to how we can do this better, please let us know.

Any student with particular needs should contact the office of Disability Resources for Students (uwdrs@uw.edu) at the start of the quarter. That office will prepare materials that you can bring to the instructor and TAs explaining any approved accommodations needed for this course. You should then share these materials with the instructor and TA as soon as possible.

Books and Readings

Required reading for this course will be roughly 100-150 pages each week. This may seem like a lot, but reading is a vital part of this (and every history) course. Think of it as the alternative to problem sets; it is that important. Part of what we hope to impart to you are the skills to read more critically and efficiently in social science and humanistic texts. Thus, the readings complement but do not duplicate the lectures. They introduce you to relevant primary historical sources, and they may offer other points of view on the course material. Expect to be tested on them! The reading load varies from week to week, so please plan
ahead. If you are new to college-level history—and even if you are not—I recommend reading the handout, “How to Read a Historical Monograph” (assigned for Week 1). This is a four-page document that can literally save you hours of time, and which explains how and what to read when you know you can’t get it all done. The following books are required and are available for purchase at the University Bookstore, electronically via the UW libraries, and on-reserve in hardcopy at Odegaard Undergraduate Library:


You should complete the readings before the lecture for which they are assigned; in all cases, make sure you have done the readings prior to Friday’s section. An asterisk (*) indicates a reading that we will be discussing during lecture. Be sure you have read it prior to class, and bring a copy if you are able to.

**Additional Readings:** Several articles and chapters, also required, are available either through the UW library website (look for “on-line access”) or through the Canvas site. The location of each reading is indicated in the syllabus as either “UW lib” or “website.”

**Films:** For the weeks of November 23, there is a film assigned in addition to reading. You are to watch this film on your own time. They will be available to you as “streaming reserves”; precise details on how to access them will follow.

**Recommended Text:** I do not assign a textbook for this course, nor do my lectures follow a textbook. (The lectures are the textbook!) However, if you would like to consult a textbook on U.S. Environmental History in order to further your understanding of the field, I can recommend: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature’s Role in American History*, rev. ed. (2009).

**Discussion Sections**
Discussion sections are a required and important part of this course. They are your opportunity to discuss, critique, and ask questions about the readings and course assignments, and, through that process, gain a deeper understanding of the course themes and concepts. Sections also offer us the opportunity to work on aspects of the research paper in a smaller group. We also hope that the sections will help you to further develop and articulate your own ideas on environmental and US history. In order for those sections to be intellectually engaging and worth your time, it is essential that everyone come prepared to discuss the assigned texts. You should bring a copy (preferably annotated) of the readings with you to section. We place a high value on the sections and hope that you will too. Your verbal participation amounts to close to 20% of your course grade, and we expect most of that participation to take place during sections; your TA will establish more specific expectations for his or her section. If you must miss a section, please discuss this in advance with your TA. More than 2 absences from section will typically result in a “0” for course participation.

**Assignments and Grading**

1. Participation, including informed participation in lectures and discussion sections, including occasional short writing assignments (1-2 paragraphs) and quizzes (20%).

2. An in-class midterm on Thursday, November 4 (20%).

3. A 8-10 page (2000-2500 words) “place paper” on an approved topic (30%). The paper assignment also has 2 required preliminary assignments: (i) Topic Description and “Tangible
Object” assignment (due Friday, October 9); (ii) Rough Draft (minimum of 6 pages; due November 23). These assignments will be graded \(-, -, +, +\) and incorporated into the final paper grade. Final papers are due by the beginning of lecture on Wednesday, December 9. Rough drafts and final papers turned in late will be assessed a penalty of 0.2 points/day. In order to receive any credit, the last date to submit rough drafts is Wednesday, November 25; the last day to submit final papers is Monday, December 14 at 5:00 pm. Please turn your papers in via Canvas unless the TA or Professor instructs you otherwise.

(4) An in-class final on Monday, December 14, 8:30-10:20 a.m. (30%).

Written assignments should be turned in via Canvas, unless otherwise instructed by your T.A. If for any reason, you are having trouble with an electronic submission, you are welcome to bring a hardcopy of your assignment to turn in to the instructor or T.A.

The Fine Print: Exams must be taken on the assigned day and handwritten in ink. Exceptions will be made only in cases of documented emergencies or formally identified disability accommodations. It is the student’s sole responsibility to make sure that papers have been properly received by their instructors. Failure to attempt any one of the major written assignments (i.e., midterm exam, rough draft, final paper, or final exam) will result in a failing grade for the course.

Additional Information
The schedule for the course, outlines for each lecture, and the paper assignments are, or will be, available via Canvas. Typically I post the outline the evening before the lecture is scheduled so that you can print the outline before class. In addition, you can access various resources for the course, including past student place papers, from the course website (http://faculty.washington.edu/lnash/221/221_home.htm); there is also a link to this on the Canvas page. I will continue to update the on-line materials over the course of the quarter with new materials and any changes to the schedule.

Email: I will check and try to respond to email related to this course on weekday afternoons. This means that if you email me Friday night, you should not necessarily expect a response before Monday afternoon—though I will check email more often just prior to the exams and paper due dates. Just so you know, I don’t have a smart phone and I rarely check email in the evenings. Please put “221” somewhere in the subject line of your email. You do not need to email me to tell me you will not be in lecture (but you should always be in lecture!). If you must miss a lecture, please make arrangements to get the notes from a fellow student.

Laptops: This year, for the first time, I am not going to allow general use of laptops or other devices during lecture. There are several reasons for this. The first is that students increasingly report being distracted by their neighbor’s on-line activities. Secondly, it is much harder for me to stay focused on teaching in such an environment. This is an experiment, and we will review it together after a couple of weeks. In the meantime, if you feel that the lack of a personal screen during class will adversely affect your learning in any way, I am happy to make an exception; I ask, however, that you come to see me in person to request this exception.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct, and ultimately it devalues both the person who engages in it and the broader learning environment in this course and the university. True intellectual work requires the free, open, and honest exchange of ideas.

The Committee on Academic Conduct in the College of Arts and Sciences has defined plagiarism in the following way:
- Using another writer's words without proper citation.
Using another writer's ideas without proper citation.
Citing your source but reproducing the exact words of a printed source without quotation marks; or, borrowing the structure of another author's phrases or sentences without crediting the author from whom it came.
Borrowing all or part of another student's paper or using someone else's outline to write your own paper.
Using a paper writing "service" or having a friend write the paper for you.

The obligation to properly cite the work of others applies to internet, oral, and written sources. The key to avoiding plagiarism is to show clearly where your own thinking ends and someone else’s begins. For additional resources on avoiding plagiarism and appropriately citing various types of sources, please see the link on the course website.

It is my sincere hope that no one in this course will be tempted to plagiarize any portion of their paper assignment. To avoid the possibility of that temptation, you are urged to choose a topic that truly interests you; begin your assignment early; ask questions about anything you are unsure of; ask for any kind of help that you need.

If plagiarism is discovered, it will be treated very seriously. A paper in which significant portions have been plagiarized will be forwarded to the Dean’s representative on Academic Misconduct. If plagiarism is confirmed, the student will receive a 0 for the assignment, and may also receive a failing grade in the course.

Schedule of Lectures and Readings
(While I do not anticipate changing the schedule below, there is always the possibility that changes will be necessary. Any changes will be announced in lecture and posted to the Canvas site.)

Sep 30: Introduction: Environmental Change before 1492
Reading: “How to Read A Historical Monograph” [website]
Anderson, Creatures of Empire, Part 1

Oct 5: The Columbian Exchange
Oct 7: Globalization in the 16th and 17th Centuries: The Fur Trade
Reading: Anderson, Creatures of Empire, Part 2
Richard Francaviglia, “Interpreting the Landscape” from Hard Places [website]

Due Oct 9 (in section): Tangible Object Assignment

Reading: *Dedham Grant Deed (1667) [website];
*Anderson, Creatures of Empire, Part 3
Phillip D. Morgan, Slave Counterpoint (1998), chapter 1 [website];

Oct 14: Landscapes of Capitalist Industrialization

Due October 16 (in section): short writing assignment on Dedham Grant Deed
Oct 19: Colonizing the West  
*Reading:* Elliott West, “Land” and “Animals” (1995) [website]

Oct 21: Imagining the Romantic Landscape  

*Due Oct 23 (in section): Short Writing Assignment on Muir OR Thoreau*

Oct 26: Environment and Inequality in the Industrial City  


Nov 2: Progressive Conservation (from the top)  

Nov 4: MIDTERM

Nov 9: American Imperialism and Environmental Change (Cuba and the Philippines)  
Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep*, to 151 (by Friday)

Nov 11: Veterans’ Day Holiday

Nov 16: The New Deal: Planning the American Landscape (the TVA and Columbia Basin Projects)

Nov 18: Inventing Modern Agriculture  
*Reading:* Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep*, to end

Nov. 23: The Nature of American Suburbia  
*Film:* *The Vanishing Prairie* (Disney, 1952);

Due 11/23 (10:30 a.m.): Rough Draft of Place Paper

Nov 25: No Class—Happy Thanksgiving

Nov 30: The Politics and Ecology of Nuclear Weapons
Reading: *Atomic Energy Commission, “Atomic Test Effects in the Nevada Region,” 1955 [website] (N.B. read this selectively for tone and rhetorical style);

Dec 2: The Petrochemical Revolution: Supporters & Critics
Reading: *Carson, Silent Spring, 1-37, 187-198 [website];

Dec 7: Modern Environmental Movements & Merchants of Doubt

Dec 9: Environmental Justice in the Late Twentieth Century
Reading: *Blum, Love Canal Revisited (2008), 31-85 [website]

Due Wednesday, Dec 9 (10:30 a.m.): Final Place Paper

Dec. 14, 8:30-10:20 a.m.: Final Exam