

History 409—American Environmental History
Fall Semester 2002
Tues. & Thurs. 1:25-2:40 p.m.—C.U.E. 114

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Office hours: T. & TH. 3:00-5:00, and by appointment.

Course description: This course examines environment and society in America, and to a lesser extent globally—past and present. Through historical and contemporary readings, class discussions, a research project, and a community service/learning project we will consider 300 years of human occupation of North America and its environmental consequences, paying special attention in this semester to the urban environment, industrialization, pollution, energy consumption, and the ways we organize our society to address environmental problems. Hopefully you will come out of the course with a deeper sense of the complex relationship between humans and their environments, a fuller appreciation for the vital "environmental services" you depend on daily (food, light, cooling & heating, tap water, toilets), and a better understanding of the environmental consequences of basic life choices you make every day.

Requirements and grading: Rather than exams, there will be five in-class quizzes on the readings, one research project, one community service field trip, and a final take-home essay based on the readings for the semester. You will also earn points for attendance and participation in discussions. 100 points may be earned in this course. 93-100 = A; 90-92.5 = A-; 87.5-89.5 pts = B+; 83-87 pts = B; 80-82.5 pts = B-; 77.5-79.5 = C+; 73-77 = C; 70-72.5 = C-; 67.5-69.5 = D+; 60-67 = D; 59-below = F. Because student involvement substantially enhances the learning process, this class will emphasize discussion. Class attendance is therefore required and counts for 30 points of the course total. A sign-up sheet will be passed around each day for taking roll. I will make additional note of those students who contribute constructively to class discussions. High quality participation can bump you up a point or two during final grade calculations. Each of the five quizzes is worth 5 points; only your best four will count, totaling another 20 points. You can thus miss or bomb one quiz without penalty. There are no make-ups for quizzes. The quizzes will be unannounced and may occur at any time, but they will be based on the reading material for that day so if you come prepared to class you should do well. The research project counts for 20 points, the

final take-home essay is 20 points, and the community service field trip is 10 points—for a total of 100 points.

READING ASSIGNMENTS

(Note: you should complete these readings by the day indicated)

T. 8/27: Introduction (no readings)

TH. 8/29: *Environment*, introduction to Unit 1, p. 1, plus article 1: "Ideas Matter: A Political History of the Twentieth-Century Environment."

T. 9/3: NO CLASS. Read the Introduction to Melosi, *Effluent America*, pp. 1-15 for discussion on Thursday, 9/5.

TH. 9/5: Strasser, *Waste and Want*, pp. 3-19 (and Melosi, pp. 1-15).

T. 9/10: Strasser, ch. One, "The Stewardship of Objects."

TH. 9/12: Melosi, ch. 2, "Environmental Crisis in the City."

T. 9/17: Melosi, ch. 3, Pollution and the Emergence of Industrial America."

TH. 9/19: Melosi, ch. 6, The Place of the City in Environmental History."

T. 9/24: Strasser, ch. Two, "Any Rags, Any Bones."

TH. 9/26: Strasser, ch. Three, "Trash and Re-use Transformed."

T. 10/1: Melosi, ch. 7, "Cities, Technical Systems, and the Environment."

TH. 10/3 Melosi, ch. 11, "Sanitary Engineers in American Cities."

T. 10/8: Melosi, ch. 10, "Environmental Reform in the Industrial Cities."

TH. 10/10: Strasser, ch. Four, "Having and Disposing in the New Consumer Culture."

T. 10/15: Strasser, ch. Five, "Making Do and Buying New in Hard Times."

TH. 10/17: NO CLASS. Work on your research projects.

T. 10/22: Strasser, ch. Seven, "Good Riddance."

TH. 10/24: Melosi, ch. 4, "Down in the Dumps."

T. 10/29: NO CLASS. Work on your research projects.

TH. 10/31: NO CLASS. Work on your research projects.

T. 11/5: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS (**research project due**).

TH. 11/7: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS (**research project due**).

T. 11/12: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS (**research project due**).

TH. 11/14: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS (**research project due**).

T. 11/19: Melosi, ch. 5, "Hazardous Waste and Environmental Liability."

TH. 11/21: *Environment*, articles on Pollution: 27, 28, & 29

M-F 11/25-11/29: THANKSGIVING VACATION

T. 12/3: *Environment*, articles on Energy: 11, 12, 13, 14, & 15.

TH. 12/5: *Environment*, articles on Resources: 21, 23, 24, & 25.

T. 12/10: *Environment*, articles on Biosphere: 16, 17, 18, & 19.

TH. 12/12: *Environment*, articles 2, 3 & 4. Looking to the future....

TH. 12/19: FINAL ESSAY DUE IN MY OFFICE BY 5:00 p.m.

GUIDANCE FOR HIST 409 Research Project

The theme for this assignment is “Where things come from / where they go to.” Your task is to research and report on one of the following topics:

- Where does your tap water come from? (Go all the way to the ultimate source!) Who provides it? How is its quality and safety assured?
- Where does your wastewater go to? Who takes care of your water-borne wastes? How do we try to ensure that our wastes don't cause pollution problems?
- What happens to your household trash after Pullman Disposal picks it up at your curb? What is Pullman Disposal's long term plan for managing the solid waste generated locally? How does Pullman Disposal try to ensure that our garbage presents no health risks to us?
- What happens to the glass, aluminum, plastic, and/or paper that you place in your Pullman Disposal recycle bins? Or, what happens to the glass, aluminum, plastic and/or paper that you place in the WSU recycle bins on campus? (Follow each of these recycled products as far as you can.)
- How much water and energy is consumed at WSU? Who/what are the largest consumers of water and energy on campus? How is WSU attempting to meet its current and future water and energy needs?
- How much solid waste is produced on campus and who/what are the largest producers of it? What are WSU's short-term and long-term plans for managing its wastes?
- Who supplies the electricity that runs your lights, refrigerator, stereo and computer? How is it generated? What are some of the environmental impacts of electrical generation and how does your electricity supplier deal with those problems? What are your electric utility's long-term energy supply plans?
- Where does the paper you use in your printer or notebook come from? (Follow it to its source!) How is it produced? What are some of the environmental impacts of paper production and how are those problems dealt with?
- Where do the bags of peas and lentils in your grocery store come from? Who grows them and who processes them? What are some of the environmental impacts of growing and processing peas and lentils? What efforts are made to mitigate those impacts?

- For those who want to do some international research: Where do the coffee beans that infuse your Starbucks latte come from? What are some of the environmental impacts of coffee production? How are those impacts addressed and by whom?

Your research will most likely involve making verbal contact with appropriate authorities and companies rather than traditional library research, although Web research may be helpful. Your report should be both written and oral. Both are due Oct. 5-14. Your paper should be at least five pages, typed and double-spaced. You may work singly or in pairs. If two of you work together, you may submit one paper between you but you must both share the oral presentation. Have fun!