

Andrew Isenberg
American Environmental History
Princeton, 2004

This course examines the interactions between human societies and the natural world in what is now the United States. That relationship is complex: the environment both reflects people's influences and affects human history. Through reading and discussion, participants in this course will examine this reciprocal relationship. Issues to be discussed in the course include Native American management of the environment; the effects of the European ecological invasion; resource exploitation in the industrial era; the foundations of the preservationist and conservationist movements at the beginning of the twentieth century; the evolution of twentieth-century environmentalism; and the historical context of current environmental problems.

READINGS:

- Alfred Crosby, Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
- William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England (New York: Hill & Wang, 1983).
- J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds., The Great New Wilderness Debate (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).
- Arthur F. McEvoy, The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and Law in the California Fisheries, 1850-1980 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
- Richard White, Land Use, Environment, and Social Change: The Shaping of Island County, Washington (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980).
- Andrew C. Isenberg, The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- Donald Worster, Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).
- Andrew Hurley, Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).
- Ernest Callenbach, Ecotopia (New York: Bantam, 1990).
- Nicholas Evans, The Loop (New York: Dell, 1999).

EVALUATION:

The final grade in this course will be based on participation in discussion (25%); a weekly journal of responses to the readings (25%); a five-page analytical paper due before the spring break (25%); and a synthetic, six-to-ten-page final paper (25%).

There are five opportunities to submit the first five-page paper. It may be submitted on Feb. 12, Feb. 19, Feb. 26, March 4, or March 11. Each of those dates has a different essay topic

based on the week's readings. The analytical paper may not be submitted late. You must submit the paper on the day it is due or avail yourself of a future opportunity to write the paper.

Journal entries are due, either in hard copy or by e-mail, 24 hours before your weekly precept meeting. They should include your reaction to the readings, suggestions for questions to be discussed during the coming precept meeting, and a continuing discussion of how the readings relate to the main themes of the course. You need not submit a journal entry in the week that you write your five-page analytical paper, nor need you submit one the first week, so the total number of journal entries is ten.

READING ASSIGNMENTS:

Feb 5: GOOD STORIES

Donald Worster, "Doing Environmental History," in Worster, ed., The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 289-307.

William Cronon, "The Uses of Environmental History," Environmental History Review, 17 (Fall 1993), 1-22.

Matt Cartmill, "The Bambi Syndrome," in A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

In-class video: the 1942 Walt Disney animated film, "Bambi."

Feb 12: THE ECOLOGY OF INVASIONS

Crosby, Ecological Imperialism, 1-103, 132-216, 269-308.

William M. Denevan, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492," in Callicott and Nelson, eds., Great New Wilderness Debate, 414-442.

Jared Diamond, "The Accidental Conqueror," Discover, 10 (December 1989), 71-76.

Essay: Crosby wrote in Ecological Imperialism: "humans were seldom masters of the biological changes they induced in the Neo-Europes. They benefited from the great majority of these changes, but benefit or not, their role was less a matter of judgment and choice than of being downstream of a bursting dam." (p. 192). Assess Crosby's statement in light of the history of early North America.

Feb 19: ENCOUNTER

Cronon, Changes in the Land, entire.

Calvin Martin, "The European Impact on the Culture of an Algonquian Tribe: An Ecological Interpretation," William & Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., 31 (January 1974), 3-26.

Essay: Why did Indians in North America participate in the fur trade with European colonists?

Feb 26: NATURE AND CULTURE

Alan Taylor, "'Wasty Ways': Stories of American Settlement," Environmental History, 3 (July 1998), 291-310.

Daniel J. Herman, Hunting and the American Imagination (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 27-46, 75-113.

Benjamin Franklin, "An Account of the New-Invented Pennsylvania Fire-Places," (1744), in Richard Current, et al., eds., Words That Made American History: Colonial Times to the 1870s, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 28-29.

Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia (1787), ed. William Peden (New York: Norton, 1954), 26-72.

Selections from Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau, in Callicott and Nelson, eds., Great New Wilderness Debate, 23-47.

Essay: How did changes in colonists' understanding of "Nature" affect the North American environment?

Mar 4: RESOURCE USE

McEvoy, Fisherman's Problem, 19-92.

White, Land Use, entire.

Essay: Assess the impact of the United States market economy upon the North American environment in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Mar 11: ECOLOGY, ECONOMY, AND CULTURE

Isenberg, Destruction of the Bison, 1-163.

Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850," Journal of American History, 78 (September 1991), 465-485.

Richard Irving Dodge, The Hunting Grounds of the Great West (1877; Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 140-159.

Columbus Delano, Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 3-10.

"Protection of Buffaloes," Congressional Record, (March 10, 1874), 2105-2109.

"Slaughter of Buffaloes," Congressional Record, (February 23, 1876), 1237-1241.

Hamlin Russell, "The Story of the Buffalo," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 86 (April 1893), 796-798.

Essay: What caused the near-extinction of the bison?

SPRING BREAK

Mar 26: PRESERVATIONISM AND CONSERVATIONISM

Isenberg, Destruction of the Bison, 164-198.

McEvoy, Fisherman's Problem, 93-119.
Selections from John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt; William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature"; Marvin Henberg, "Wilderness, Myth, and American Character"; Donald M. Waller, "Getting Back to the Right Nature," in Callicott and Nelson, eds., Great New Wilderness Debate, 48-74, 471-510, 540-567.
Gifford Pinchot, "How Conservation Began in the United States," Agricultural History, 11 (1937), 255-265.

April 1: AMERICAN AGRICULTURE

McEvoy, Fisherman's Problem, 123-155.
Worster, Dust Bowl, 3-243.
William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," Journal of American History, 78 (March 1992), 1347-1376.
John S. Steinhart and Carol E. Steinhart, "Energy Use in the U.S. Food System," Science, 184 (12 April 1974), 307-316.

April 8: THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY WILDERNESS ETHIC

Aldo Leopold, "Conservation Esthetic," "Wildlife in American Culture," "Wilderness," and "The Land Ethic," in Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 165-226.
Leopold, "Wilderness as a Form of Land Use"; Robert Marshall, "The Problem of the Wilderness"; Mark Woods, "Federal Wilderness Preservation in the United States"; Michael P. Nelson, "An Amalgamation of Wilderness Preservation Arguments"; Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique"; David Johns, "Deep Ecology and the Third World"; Guha, "Deep Ecology Revisited"; Carl Talbot, "The Wilderness Narrative and the Cultural Logic of Capitalism"; J. Baird Callicott, "The Wilderness Idea Revisited"; Holmes Rolston III, "The Wilderness Idea Reaffirmed"; Callicott, "That Good Old-Time Wilderness Religion"; Dave Foreman, "Wilderness Areas for Real"; Reed Noss, "Sustainability and Wilderness," in Callicott and Nelson, eds., Great New Wilderness Debate, 75-96, 113-198, 231-279, 325-413.

April 15: THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Hurley, Environmental Inequalities, entire.
Richard White, "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," in Cronon, ed., Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature (New York: Norton, 1995), 171-185.

April 22: THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

McEvoy, Fisherman's Problem, 227-257.

Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," Science, 162
(13 December 1968), 243-248.
Paul Ehrlich, The Population Bomb (New York: Ballantine,
1968), 15-35.
Rachel Carson, Silent Spring (Boston: Houghton Mifflin,
1962), 5-13.
Callenbach, Ecotopia, entire.

April 29: NARRATIVES OF ENDANGERMENT

Ernest Thompson Seton, Wild Animals I Have Known, 17-54.
Aldo Leopold, "Thinking Like a Mountain," in Leopold, A Sand
County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1987), 129-133.
Nicholas Evans, The Loop, entire.
Matt Cartmill, "The Bambi Syndrome," in A View to a Death in
the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History
(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).