

Derek R. Larson
U.S. Environmental History
The College of St. Benedict | St. John's University, Spring 2002

I think the human race has become a plague on this Earth. There are far too many of us making too many demands on one defenseless little planet.
-Edward Abbey

I love spotted owls-- fried.

-bumper sticker c.1989

Course Description:

Environmental history is a field of study concerned with the changing relationships between humans and nature over time. In this course we will explore the environmental history of the United States in the 20th century, a period marked by such advances as the creation new federal resource management agencies like the US Forest Service and National Park Service, the passage of preservationist laws including the Wilderness Act and the Endangered Species Act, and a rising tide of public concern over the environment-- but a time also marked by the loss of the passenger pigeon, the near elimination of wolves from the lower 48 states, the proliferation of pesticides and herbicides such as DDT, and environmental disasters like Love Canal and the Exxon Valdez oil spill. At the century's end the U.S. has protected more of its land and wildlife than any other nation, and yet while representing only 4% of the world's population Americans consumed about 50% of the energy and other resources used worldwide. With this tension in mind we will trace the development of the conservation and environmental movements as their ideas spread from a handful of public officials and wilderness enthusiasts at the beginning of the 20th century to the point where a commanding majority of Americans considered themselves environmentalists in the final decade of the century. The political, cultural, economic, technological, spiritual, and of course ecological factors behind this progression will be our major concerns as we read a variety of sources to examine how Americans have shaped their natural environment over the past 100 years-- and how the environment has shaped them.

Required Readings:

Rothman, Hal	<i>Saving the Planet: The American Response to the Environment in the 20th Century</i>
Nash, Roderick Frazier	<i>American Environmentalism: Readings in Conservation History</i> (3 rd ed., 1990)
Wilkins, Thurman	<i>John Muir: Apostle of Nature</i>
Abbey, Edward	<i>The Monkey-Wrench Gang</i>
Wilkinson, Charles	<i>Crossing the Next Meridian: Land, Water, and the Future of the West</i>

Assignments and Grading:

I grade on a standard A-AB-B-BC etc. scale. Grades will be based on two reflection papers, an in-class exam, two group projects, a final research paper, and general participation score that will

reflect your attendance, preparation, and participation over the course of the semester. Details on all of these assignments, as well as the final research project, will be distributed in class well in advance of the due dates.

Final grades will be computed as follows:

Ref. #1 (Wilkins)	15%
Ref. #2 (Abbey)	15%
Midterm exam	20%
Group projects	10%
Research paper	25%
Participation	<u>15%</u>
	100%

Written Assignments:

All written work must be typed and carefully checked for spelling, grammatical, and typographical errors. Papers with excessive errors will be returned ungraded for you to correct. Grades will be based on clarity of writing, quality of analysis, and use of evidence. Late papers will be reduced one full grade per day; exceptions will be granted only through advance arrangement or with a note from your doctor. Please note that the Department of History upholds the institutional policy on plagiarism that was developed by students and faculty in the spring of 1998. You can consult the 1998-2000 Academic Catalog under "academic honesty" or the student handbooks (SJU *J-Book* or CSB *Every Woman's Guide*) for the details of this policy.

Participation:

Your participation grade will be based on your performance in class— an admittedly subjective assessment of your attendance, preparation, contributions to class discussion, and contributions to our on-line discussions. An “average” participant will show up every day, have the reading mostly done, and speak when called upon; this student would earn a C grade for participation. Better preparation, frequent and thoughtful contributions to discussion, and ongoing participation in the on-line discussion will yield a correspondingly higher grade. If at any point you would like an assessment of your participation please do not hesitate to ask.

Course Schedule:

The schedule lists class meetings by date, grouped by week, with general topics noted in the center column. Reading and writing assignments are listed in the right-hand column. All readings must be completed by the date assigned and all written work is due at the beginning of class on the dates noted. While exams and papers will not be changed, some topics may be adjusted to meet our needs as the course evolves. Note that reading assignments listed as "AE" can be found in *American Environmentalism* and are listed by document number. Assignments noted simply as "handout" indicate items that will be distributed in class.

Tentative Spring Class Schedule

Date:	Topic:	Assignment:
Tue 1/15	Course intro	Bioregional quiz
Thur 1/17	History & Culture	Lynn White handout; AE 1,3
Mon 1/21	19 th century America	Nash handout; AE 2,5
Wed 1/23	video on western art	<i>Smithsonian</i> articles (handout); meet in Q346 Little Theater
Fri 1/25	Yellowstone & the Frontier	Yellowstone Act handout; Turner handout; AE 4
Tue 1/29	John Muir	Rothman 11-33; Wilkins p.xvii-168; AE 6
Thur 1/31	John Muir	Wilkins 169-283
Mon 2/4	Progressive Conservation	Rothman 34-59; AE 8,10-11; Essay #1 due
Wed 2/6	National Forests	Pinchot handout; AE 9,12-14
Fri 2/8	Hetch-Hetchy Controversy	Smith article handout; AE 16-18
Tue 2/12	National Parks	NPS/Antiquities Act handouts; AE 7
Thur 2/14	1920s Conservation	Rothman 60-84; AE 19; handout
Mon 2/18	New Deal Conservation	AE 20,22; CCC handout
Wed 2/20	Dust Bowl	AE 21; handout
Fri 2/22	Midterm exam	prepare for exam
Tue 2/26	SPRING BREAK	NO CLASS
Thur 2/28	SPRING BREAK	NO CLASS
Tue 3/5	Post-war affluence	Rothman 83-107; AE 23, 27 Wed night videos: <i>Rachel Carson's Silent Spring</i> ; <i>Wild by Law</i>
Thur 3/7	Industrial tourism	Abbey article "Industrial Tourism and the National Parks"
Mon 3/11	Wilderness	Wilderness Act; AE 15,25,28
Wed 3/13	Quality of Life	Rothman 108-130; AE 30-35
Fri 3/15	Environmental Law	handout; Rothman 131-137
Tue 3/19	Environmental Law	group reports
Thur 3/21	Ed Abbey video	Monkey Wrench Gang 1-184; ecotage handout

Mon	3/25	Monkey Wrench Gang	Monkey Wrench Gang 185-421
Wed	3/27	Earth Day	AE 36,38,39,42; Essay #2 due
Fri	3/29	EASTER BREAK	NO CLASS
Mon	4/1	EASTER BREAK	NO CLASS
Wed	4/3	Animal Rights	handout; group reports on AR organizations
Fri	4/5	Ecofeminism	handout; in-class exercise (Larson in Atlanta?)
Tue	4/9	Love Canal	handout
			Wed night video: <i>The China Syndrome</i>
Thur	4/11	Three Mile Island	handout
Mon	4/15	Public Natural Resources	Wilkinson 3-113; team-led discussions (minerals and grazing)
Wed	4/17	Public Natural Resources	Wilkinson 114-218; team-led discussions (forests and rivers)
Fri	4/19	Anti-environmentalism	Wilkinson 293-306; Rothman 158-183; handout
Tue	4/23	topic TBA	TBA
Thur	4/25	topic TBA	TBA
Mon	4/29	Future of environmentalism?	Rothman 184-205; AE 44,45,50,51
Wed	5/1	Research presentations	
Fri	5/3	Research presentations	

Research papers due in my office by 5:00pm Tuesday May 7th