

American Environmental History - 43.316.201
(TR, 9:30-10:45)

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Office Hours:

This course explores the environmental history of early America and the United States from the end of the last ice age (c. 12,500 years ago) to the present. It examines the role played by nature as an historical agent as well as the relationship between human communities and the physical and organic environment. Course themes include evolving land use, the environmental significance of industrial capitalism, urban public health, resource conservation and wilderness protection, the impact of ecology on public consciousness, as well as environmentalism. Among the major questions we will investigate are: How have human beings in what became the United States used and thought about the natural environment? In what ways has this changed over time and varied by cultural group? In what ways did nature impose its own limits on human use and consciousness? Did Americans degrade or abuse the environment? How did they respond to perceived and real environmental degradation? How did class, race, and gender shape these responses? Were the responses effective? Why or why not?

Assigned Readings (available at South Campus bookstore and local libraries):

Shepard Krech, *The Ecological Indian*
Henry David Thoreau, *A Year in Thoreau's Journal, 1851*
Niccola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The Letters of Sacco & Vanzetti*
Nancy Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*
Edmund Russell, *War and Nature*
John Nichols, *The Milagro Beanfield War*

Assignments:

Participation - 20%
Analytical Essays -- 50%
Research Paper - 30%

Participation: I will assess class participation based on both the quantity and quality of the contributions you make during discussions of the assigned books (Krech, Thoreau, Sacco/Vanzetti, Tomes, Russell, and Nichols). During each class meeting scheduled for discussion, you will assemble in small groups to discuss a list of distributed questions. Active involvement in these small groups is worth 20% of your final course grade.

Analytical Essays: A considerable amount of the final course grade will come from the average of your analytical essays. These will address the assigned topics below and require use of lecture material, readings, and films. They should be 3-4 pages in length (typed, double-spaced, with one inch margins), and are due on the day of the relevant book discussion. There are six topics to choose from. You need only do five essays, or may complete all six and have your lowest grade dropped. Each essay is worth 10% of your final course grade.

- Essay 1 – Native Americans and the Use of Nature
- Essay 2 – Transcendentalists on Nature
- Essay 3 – Nature and Radicalism
- Essay 4 – Miasmatic v. Germ Theory of Disease
- Essay 5 – Pesticides and Progress
- Essay 6 – Environment, Race, and Class in the Postwar Era

Research Paper: Your major writing assignment is a research paper on some aspect of American Environmental History. First, you must choose a workable topic and write a typed, one-page proposal with an attached bibliography of secondary sources (no need to use primary sources), **due in class on March 8**. Topics should not be either too specific or too general, and there should be a significant literature to draw on for your research. You might, for example, investigate yellow fever in the 18th and 19th centuries, the early creation of national parks, United Farm Worker opposition to pesticide use in the 1960s, etc. There is whole range of topics to choose from. If you want some guidance in this you are welcome to visit me during office hours or by arranged appointment. Once your proposal has been approved, you need to do the research and prepare both a **rough draft** of your paper, to be exchanged for revision with a partner **in class on May 3**, as well as a 10 minute **presentation for either May 5, 10, or 12**. A **final draft of the paper is due in class on May 12**.

Late Paper Policy: Failure to turn in assignments on time (which usually also means in class) will result in deduction of half of a letter grade for every class day late. I will only make exceptions to deadlines if a student has a legitimate reason (which does not include printer trouble, hangovers, etc.) and written documentation.

Grading Scale: On all assignments the grading scale is as follows: A (95 and above), AB (90 and above), B (85 and above), BC (80 and above), C (75 and above), CD (70 and above), D (65 and above), and F (64 and below). This corresponds to the University's scale of A (4.0), AB (3.5), B (3.0), BC (2.5), C (2.0), CD (1.5), D (1.0), and F (0). If at any time you have questions about the grading on an assignment and/or wish to dispute a grade you should come see me during office hours. I will only consider serious and well-reasoned arguments for changing a grade.

Plagiarism and Cheating: When you use the words or ideas of others, you must document your source with the proper method of citation. For this course, you will be expected to use footnotes to indicate your sources. The one exception to this rule is the use of lecture material. Evidence of plagiarism in papers – in violation of University policy – will result in an F on the assignment.

Classroom/Course Accommodations: If you have any special learning needs please let me know and I will see about making the course and/or classroom more accommodating (typically you must have documentation from Disability Services). Also notify me if your religious observances conflict at some point with assignment due dates or examinations and we will make different arrangements if necessary.

Tentative Lecture and Reading Schedule:

Week 1

Jan. 25 – Introductions, distribute syllabus, discuss excerpt from *Pocahontas*
Jan. 27 – Lecture: Precontact North America

Readings: Shepard Krech, *The Ecological Indian*

Week 2

Feb. 1 – Lecture: Ecological Revolutions
Feb. 3 – Lecture: Tobacco, Rice, and Cotton

Readings: Shepard Krech, *The Ecological Indian*

Week 3

Feb. 8 – Discussion: Krech; Essay 1 due
Feb. 10 – Lecture: Transcendental Revolt

Readings: Henry David Thoreau, *A Year in Thoreau's Journal, 1851*

Week 4

Feb. 15 – Documentary (excerpt) and Discussion: *Writings of Emerson and Thoreau*
Feb. 17 – Lecture: Species Shifting in the West

Readings: Henry David Thoreau, *A Year in Thoreau's Journal, 1851*

Week 5

Feb. 22 – No class meeting (Monday class schedule)
Feb. 24 – Discuss Thoreau; Essay 2 due

Readings: Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The Letters of Sacco & Vanzetti*

Week 6

Mar. 1 – Lecture: Making a New South
Mar. 3 – Lecture: Resource Conservation

Readings: Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The Letters of Sacco & Vanzetti*

Week 7

Mar. 8 – Lecture: Preserving Wilderness

Mar. 10 – Discussion: Sacco & Vanzetti; Essay 3 and **Research Paper proposal due**

Week 8

Spring Break

Readings: Nancy Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*

Week 9

Mar. 22 – Lecture: Urban Environmental Reform

Mar. 24 – Discussion: Tomes; Essay 4 due

Readings: Edmund Russell, *War and Nature*

Week 10

Mar. 29 – Lecture: FDR to Aldo Leopold

Mar. 31 – Films and Discussion: *The Plow that Broke the Plains/The River*

Readings: Edmund Russell, *War and Nature*

Week 11

Apr. 5 – Lecture: Suburbanization and Petrochemicals

Apr. 7 – Discussion: Russell; Essay 5 due

Readings: John Edmund Russell, *War and Nature*

Week 12

Mar. 12 – Lecture: Evolution of Ecology

Mar. 14 – Lecture: Environmental Reform

Readings: John Nichols, *The Milagro Beanfield War*

Week 13

Mar. 19 – Film: *Silent Spring*

Mar. 21 – Lecture: Environmental Justice

Readings: John Nichols, *The Milagro Beanfield War*

Week 14

Mar. 26 – Film: *To Save the Land and People*
Mar. 28 – Discussion: Nichols; Essay 6 due

Finish writing Research Paper rough drafts and prepare presentations

Week 15

May 3 – **Revise Research Paper rough drafts in class**
May 5 – Presentations

Prepare Research Paper final drafts

Week 16

May 10 – Presentations
May 12 – Presentations; **Research Paper final drafts due**