

History 252G/352G

THE ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF URBAN AMERICA

Stanford University
Fall 2006
Wednesdays, 2:15 - 4:05 p.m.
Education 207

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This course traces the process of city building in America from the early nineteenth century to present and explores the ways in which environment, ideas of nature, and cities have shaped each other. Among the topics of study are: early reactions to industrialization and urbanization; relationships between cities and their hinterlands; urban interactions with water; moral environmentalism and the development of public parks and suburbs; concerns about pollution, public health, and environmental justice; and the consequences of contemporary urban sprawl.

Since the best way to learn how to think historically is to do what a historian does, the principal assignment in the course asks students to write their own environmental history of an urban place or theme of their choosing. Descriptions of course materials, assignments, grading policies, and the course schedule are below.

COURSE MATERIALS:

Required readings come from five sources:

1. **Books.** Five books are available at the Stanford Bookstore and on reserve in Green Library:
 - Thomas Bender, *Toward an Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century America* (1975).
 - William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991).
 - Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (1998).
 - Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (1995).
 - David Stradling, *Smokestacks and Progressives: Environmentalists, Engineers, and Air Quality in America, 1881-1995* (2003).
2. **Reader.** A course reader is available at the Bookstore and on reserve in Green.
3. **Online Sources.** URLs for online sources are printed in the schedule.
4. **Library Reserve.** Three book chapters and one film are on 2-hour reserve in Green.
5. **In-Class Handouts.** Most handouts are already listed on the syllabus.

Reading averages about 160 pages per week, although the amount varies from week to week. To help you manage the reading load, the syllabus lists in parentheses the approximate number of pages to be read for a given week. **You should come to class each week having read the materials listed for that date.**

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS:

Undergraduate students are responsible for completing the following assignments:

- Team-lead our discussion for one class meeting.
- Read one book from the Additional Reading list and discuss it with the class in a 7-8-minute presentation.
- Write two papers of 2-3 pages each responding to the week's reading.
- Write an environmental history of 12-15 pages (preceded by a research prospectus of 2-3 pages) that explores a particular urban place or theme.

Graduate students are responsible for completing the following assignments:

- Team-lead our discussion for one class meeting.
- Read one book from the Additional Reading list and discuss it with the class in a 7-8-minute presentation.
- Write *five* papers of 2-3 pages each responding to the week's reading.
- Write an environmental history of 15-20 pages (preceded by a research prospectus of 2-3 pages) that explores a particular urban place or theme; *or write a historiographical essay of the same length that discusses the literature on a specific aspect of urban environmental history.*

Details about the assignments are available toward the end of this syllabus.

GRADING:

Grades have four components:

- **Participation** (30%) consists of class attendance, which is **mandatory**; active class discussion that reflects knowledge of the readings; and co-leading a discussion during one week of classes.
- **Oral Presentation** (10%).
- **Response Papers** (20%).
- **Research Prospectus and Final Paper** (40%).

Note that **I will not offer bonus credit, and paper extensions will not be available.** Since you will have some flexibility in choosing when to turn in assignments and deliver your oral presentation, I will expect you to balance your overall workload this semester in such a way that you are able to meet this course's deadlines.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Cities and Nature: Introductions

Week 1, 9/27: Overview of the Course

Week 2, 10/4: Thinking About Cities and Nature

Reading (110):

- Christine Meisner Rosen and Joel Tarr, "The Importance of an Urban Perspective in Environmental History," *Journal of Urban History* 20 (May 1994), 299-310.
- Martin Melosi, "The Place of the City in Environmental History," *Environmental History Review* 17 (Spring 1993), 1-23.
- Anne Spirn, "Prologue: The Granite Garden," in *The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design* (1984), 3-5.
- Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear*, chapter 1.
- Jenny Price, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.," *The Believer* (April and May, 2006) (http://www.believmag.com/issues/200604/?read=article_price).

Additional Reading:

- Joel Tarr, "Urban History and Environmental History in the United States: Complementary and Overlapping Fields" (<http://www.h-net.org/~environ/historiography/usurban.htm>).

Building Cities

Week 3, 10/11: Early Industrialization

Reading (220):

- Thomas Bender, *Toward an Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century America* (1975), entire.
- Chad Montrie, "'I Think Less of the Factory than of My Native Dell': Labor, Nature, and the Lowell 'Mill Girls,'" *Environmental History* 9 (April 2004), 275-295 (<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/eh/9.2/montrie.html>).

Additional Reading:

- John Cumbler, *Reasonable Use: The People, the Environment, and the State, New England, 1790-1930* (2001).
- Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964).
- Theodore Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Waters of New England* (1994).

Week 4, 10/18: Cities and Hinterlands

Reading (300):

- Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991), entire.

Additional Reading:

- Michael Conzen, *Frontier Farming In An Urban Shadow: The Influence of Madison's Proximity on the Agricultural Development of Blooming Grove, Wisconsin* (1971).
- Marc Linder and Lawrence Zacharias, *Of Cabbages and Kings County: Agriculture and the Formation of Modern Brooklyn* (1999).
- Richard Wines, *Fertilizer in America: From Waste Recycling to Resource Exploitation* (1985).

Week 5, 10/25: The Urbanization of Water

Assignment: Research proposal is due at the beginning of class.

Reading (55):

- Michael Rawson, "The Nature of Water: Reform and the Antebellum Crusade for Municipal Water in Boston," *Environmental History* (July, 2004), 411-435 (<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/eh/9.3/rawson.html>).
- Jeff Fleischer, "Blue Gold: An Interview with Maude Barlow," *Mother Jones*, Jan. 14, 2005 (http://www.motherjones.com/news/qa/2005/01/maude_barlow.html).
- Jared Orsi, "Water in Los Angeles: A Portrait of an Urban Ecosystem" prologue from *Hazardous Metropolis: Flooding and Urban Ecology in Los Angeles* (2004), 1-10.
- Anne Spirn, "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted," in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1995), 91-113 (we will read pp. 102-110). **HANDOUT.**
- Cornelia Dean and Andrew C. Revkin, "After Centuries of 'Controlling' Land, Gulf Residents Learn Who's Really the Boss," *New York Times*, August 30, 2005, A14. **HANDOUT.**
- "How to Rebuild New Orleans," *New York Times*, September 10, 2005, A27. **HANDOUT.**
- Steve Chapman, "Why Even Think About Rebuilding New Orleans in the Same Place?" *The Baltimore Sun*, September 19, 2005, 9A (find on LexisNexis Academic).

Additional Reading:

- Blake Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth* (1999).
- Sarah Elkind, *Bay Cities and Water Politics: The Battle for Resources in Boston & Oakland* (1998).
- Ari Kelman, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans* (2003).

Environmental Consequences and Responses

Week 6, 11/1: Pollution, Waste, Disease, and Public Health

Reading (220):

- David Stradling, *Smokestacks and Progressives: Environmentalists, Engineers, and Air Quality in America, 1881-1951* (1999), entire.
- Theodore Steinberg, "Death of the Organic City," chapter 10 in *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* (2002), 157-172.

Additional Reading:

- Martin Melosi, *Garbage in the Cities: Refuse, Reform, and the Environment, 1880-1980* (1981).
- Charles Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (1962).
- Marilyn Thornton Williams, *Washing "The Great Unwashed": Public Baths in Urban America, 1840-1920* (1991).

Week 7, 11/8: Early Parks and Suburbs

Readings (105):

Parks

- Terence Young, "The American Park Movement," chapter 1 in *Building San Francisco's Parks, 1850-1930* (2004), 1-30. **RESERVE.**
- Andrew Jackson Downing, "A Talk about Public Parks and Gardens," *Horticulturist* (October 1848), 153-158.
- Roy Rosenzweig, "Middle-Class Parks and Working-Class Play: The Struggle Over Recreational Space in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1870-1910," *Radical History Review* 21 (1979), 31-46.

Suburbs

- Kenneth Jackson, "The Crabgrass Frontier: 150 Years of Suburban Growth in America," in Raymond Mohl and James Richardson, eds., *The Urban Experience: Themes in American History* (1973), 196-207. **HANDOUT**
- Henry George, "City and Country," chapter 21 in *Social Problems* (1883), 234-240.
- Howard Bridgman, "The Suburbanite," *The Independent* 54 (1902), 862-864.
- Robert Fishman, "Urbanity versus Suburbanity: France and the United States," chapter 4 in *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (1987), 103-133. **RESERVE.**

Additional Reading:

- Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (1992).
- David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (1986).
- Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African-American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (2004).

Week 8, 11/15: Environmental Justice

Reading (200):

- Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (1995), entire.
- Paul Hirt, "Dupes, Conspirators, Truth Seekers, and Other Breeds," in Herron and Kirk, eds., *Human/Nature: Biology, Culture, and Environmental History*, 105-119 (1999).
- Cindy Chang, "Antidevelopment Protesters Are Arrested at Farm Site in Los Angeles," *New York Times* (June 14, 2006), A14 (find on LexisNexis Academic).

Additional Reading:

- Matthew Gandy, *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City* (2002).
- Steve Lerner, *Diamond: A Struggle for Environmental Justice in Louisiana's Chemical Corridor* (2005).
- David Pellow, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago* (2002).

Cities Today and Tomorrow

Week 9, 11/29: Planned and Unplanned Sprawl

Assignment: Watch *The City* (1939, 44 minutes). **RESERVE**

Reading (140):

- Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear*, chapters 2 and 3, and pages 195-208.
- Scott Donaldson, "City and Country: Marriage Proposals," *American Quarterly* 20 (Fall 1968), 547-566 (find at <http://www.jstor.org/>).
- Kenneth Jackson, "The Crabgrass Frontier: 150 Years of Suburban Growth in America," in Raymond Mohl and James Richardson, eds., *The Urban Experience: Themes in American History* (1973), 208-221.
- Joel Kotkin, "Building up the Burbs," *Newsweek: International Edition* (July 3, 2006) (find on LexisNexis Academic).
- University of Virginia, "Reaping the Golden Harvest: Pare Lorentz, Poet and Filmmaker" (<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~1930s/FILM/lorentz/front.html>).

Additional Reading:

- John Jakle and Keith Sculle, *Lots of Parking: Land Use in a Car Culture* (2004).
- Cathy Knepper, *Greenbelt, Maryland: A Living Legacy of the New Deal* (2001).
- Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (2001).

Week 10, 12/6: The Future City

Reading (105):

- Dolores Hayden, “Nostalgia and Futurism,” chapter 10 in *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (2003), 201-229. **RESERVE.**
- Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear*, chapter 7 (chapter 6 is optional).
- Anne Spirn, “Epilogue: Visions of the Future,” in *The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design* (1984), 263-275.
- Abby Goodnough, “In Florida, Big Developer Is Counting on Rural Chic,” *New York Times*, August 22, 2005, A1, A11 (find on LexisNexis Academic).

Additional Reading:

- Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton, *The Regional City: Planning for the End of Sprawl* (2001).
- Peter Katz, *The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community* (1993).
- Andrew Ross, *The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Property Value in Disney’s New Town* (2000).

The final paper is due in my office or departmental mailbox on Tuesday, December 12, before 4:00 p.m.

DESCRIPTION OF GRADED ASSIGNMENTS:

Team-Led Discussion. During our second meeting, you will sign up to co-lead a class discussion one week during the quarter with one or two other classmates. You and your partner(s) will be responsible for developing questions on the week’s readings and helping the instructor lead discussion during class. You may prepare handouts or visual aids if you wish, but not electronic presentations such as PowerPoint and overheads. Your goal is simply to facilitate a substantive discussion of the readings. If our class is very small, then I will ask individual students rather than teams to launch our discussions. *Discussion questions and any other plans for class facilitation should be emailed to the instructor no later than 2:00 p.m. on the day before the class meeting.* The team-led discussion is part of your presentation grade, which is worth 30% of your final grade.

Presentation. Also during our second meeting, students will sign up for a presentation date. For that date, in addition to completing the regular reading for the class meeting, you will read a book from that week’s Additional Reading list. The additional book will form the basis of a 7-8-minute presentation that should summarize the book’s argument and evidence, provide your own critique of its ideas, and discuss how the book connects with our other readings for the week. The presentations have the dual benefit of exposing the entire class to additional ideas that are relevant to the week’s topic and helping each of you to hone your public speaking and critical thinking skills. The presentation is worth 10% of your grade.

Response Papers. Also during our second meeting, you will sign up for the two weeks in which your 2-3 page response papers will be due. One due date must be on or before week five, the other must be in the second half of the quarter. Your response papers

should reflect your thoughtful response to the week's readings, rather than simply summarizing them. Papers should concisely assess the readings and their relation to each other and the main themes of the course. In weeks that have a large number of short readings, you do not have to address each reading individually in your response. Do not be reluctant to point out shortcomings you find in the readings, although criticism must be constructive and convincingly argued. Each of the two response papers is worth 10% of your grade. *Note that your team-led discussion, presentation, and response papers must fall on different dates.*

Final Paper. The final paper has two components: a research proposal and the paper itself. In 2-3 pages, the proposal should summarize the subject of your research, present the question(s) you hope to answer or the argument(s) you intend to make, and include a list of possible sources. The proposal is due Week 5, in class. The final paper is an environmental history of an American urban place or theme based on secondary sources. It should be 12-15 pages in length (15-20 for graduate students), make a clear and strong argument, and connect with course themes. You could choose, for example, to explore how post-war sprawl has shaped Houston; what kind of impact urban pollution has had on the broader stream of environmental thought; how animals have adapted to the urban environment; or how the threat of natural disasters has shaped urban form and life. The possibilities are limited only by your interests. Note that your project must explore some intersection between cities and nature. Papers on the origins of federal highway construction or the management of Yosemite Park are not acceptable, for example, although the impact of highway construction on the growth of exurban communities or the use of Yosemite as a source of water for San Francisco would be perfectly appropriate topics to explore. Graduate students have the option of writing a historiographical essay on a specific aspect of the urban environmental literature instead. The final paper is worth 40% of your grade and is due in my office or departmental mailbox on Tuesday, December 12, before 4:00 p.m.