

History 85, American Environmental History  
Prof. Unger

Office: O'Connor #14

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 2:30-3:30 and by appointment

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Just what **is** "American Environmental History"? Didn't we have **enough** to try to understand in our history without a whole new discipline? This course will introduce students to this exciting and vital new field, beginning with pre-Invasion Indians and concluding with an assessment of the American environment today. Through readings and discussions we will examine a variety of influential issues and themes. Particular emphasis will be paid to politics (both domestic and foreign), gender, race, business, ethnicity and religion. The assigned readings have been selected to provide a sampling of the variety of current historical approaches to this lively discipline. Students will be able to hone their own historical skills through class discussion of readings, a midterm and a final exam, and two book reviews.

In the words of environmental historian Robert Weyeneth, "Today it is common for environmentalists to judge the American past harshly. It is easy to measure previous generations against some modern 'ecological' yardstick and find them greedy exploiters of the natural world who lived with no thought for the future. To understand the complexities of the current environmental crisis, however, we need to avoid simple generalizations that shift responsibility from ourselves to the past. This course seeks to understand the historical reasons why American society evolved as it did, heedless of environmental consequences. We will analyze how people shaped the physical environment, and how in turn environment has influenced human values and cultural institutions." In other words, it is far easier to judge our environmental past than it is to truly understand it. Yet it is the understanding of our environmental past that is the key to our future.

**FIRST THINGS FIRST:**

The first thing you'll want to do is to subscribe to the American Society for Environmental History list on H-net. H-ENVIRONMENT is a very dynamic resource that includes the daily e-mail discussion list, the website, and the book and software review program. To subscribe to the daily e-mail discussion list, address your message to Listserv@h-net.msu.edu then send this one-line email message:

subscribe H-ENVIRONMENT firstname, lastname, Santa Clara U.

If you don't get a response within a day or so, notify me. Once you are on the list you will be sent a welcoming message that contains important information (like how to get OFF the list at the end of the quarter) so make sure you print and/or save that message.

The Website address is: <http://h-net.msu.edu>

I cannot exaggerate the wealth of valuable information available through this website.

Also, Carolyn Merchant's website offers a great environmental history bibliography as well as a study guide for our text book. It's at <http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/departments/espm/env-hist/>

**REQUIRED** readings (available in the student book store)

**Books:** If you prefer not to buy them, the Merchant and Worster books are available on 2 hour reserve at the library. The Cronon book is available on ERes.

Carolyn Merchant, Major Problems in American Environmental History.

William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England.

Donald Worster, Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West.

**handouts:** Martin Lewis, "Environmental History Challenges the Myth of a Primordial Eden"  
David Helvarg, "Anti-Enviros are Getting Uglier"

In addition to the hard copies you will receive, the handouts are available on line. You can print them off the Electronic Reserve (ERes).

Go to SCU's homepage: <http://www.scu.edu/>  
click Services and Resources  
click ERes  
click Find Your Course  
click either Unger or History 85  
the password is branch

At this site you'll find a copy of this syllabus, the discussion questions, paper requirements, etc.

**REQUIRED ARTICLES** available on reserve in the library and on Electronic Reserve:

Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History"  
Randall Rohe, "Mining's Impact on the Land"  
Carolyn Merchant, "Ecofeminism"

**OPTIONAL:** There are a number of student guides to the study of history that offer suggestions on note taking, paper writing, studying, etc. If you think one might prove helpful to you, I recommend Jules R. Benjamin's A Student's Guide to History, 8th edition. See it on the web at <http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/history/research/student/intro.htm>.

Students are required to read each assignment carefully and completely BEFORE each date listed here. Participation in class discussion constitutes 10% of your course grade, to be determined by the quality, rather than quantity, of your contributions. The study/discussion questions, which should also be pondered BEFORE each class, are designed to facilitate lively discussions. The other 90% of your course grade will be determined by:

15% Brief review of William Cronon's Changes in the Land (details on separate handout)  
15% Brief review of a book on environmental history **of your own choosing**  
25% Midterm  
35% Final

## Reading Assignments and Important Dates:

Mar 29 Introduction

31 Frederick Jackson Turner's "Significance of the Frontier in American History"  
(on reserve in library)

Martin Lewis, "Environmental History Challenges the Myth of a Primordial Eden" (handout)

Apr 2 Merchant, Major Problems Chapter 1

5 Cronon, Changes in the Land Preface through Chapter 3 to be discussed in class

7 Review of entire book (Changes in the Land) due at beginning of class--no late papers!!

Cronon Chapters 4-8 discussed

9 holiday—no class!

12 Cronon 4-8 conclusion, plus Merchant Ch. 4 "Soil Exhaustion in Early South"

Due: typed title, author and 1 sentence description of the book you've selected to review

14 "Soil Exhaustion in South" continued

16 Merchant Ch. 4 continued plus Merchant Ch. 6 "Nature v. Civilization in the 19th Century"

19 "Nature v. Civilization" conclusion

21 Merchant Ch. 7 "Cotton South Before and After Civil War"

23 "Cotton South" conclusion plus background lecture on Gold Rush

26 Gold Rush continued

28 Randall Rohe, "Mining's Impact on the Land"

30 Midterm

May 3 Merchant Ch. 9 "Great Plains Grasslands Exploited" (skip Worster pp. 314-323)

5 Worster, Rivers of Empire pp. ix-60

7 Worster, Rivers of Empire pp. 61-125

10 Worster continued plus Merchant Ch. 10 "Resource Conservation..."

12 "Resource Conservation..." conclusion, plus Ch. 11 "Wilderness Preservation"

14 "Wilderness Preservation at the Turn of the Century" continued

17 "Wilderness Preservation" concluded plus Worster pp. 127-188

19 Merchant pp.484-top of 491, plus Worster pp. 189-259

21 Worster pp. 189-259 concluded, plus Merchant pp. 491-522

24 Merchant pp. 491-522 concluded plus Worster pp. 257-335

Last day to hand in **optional** drafts of book reviews

26 Merchant Ch. 15

28 Merchant, Ch. 15 continued

reserve reading "Ecofeminism"

second book review due--NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED!

31 holiday—No Class!

Jun 2 "Ecofeminism" continued, plus handout "Anti-Enviros Are Getting Uglier"

4 conclusions/evaluations/review

7 Monday at 1:30 FINAL EXAM to cover May 3-June 4

It is violation of university policy to take a final exam at anything but the appointed hour on the appointed day. Please keep this in mind as you make your end-of-the-academic year travel plans.

Both exams will be in essay form. I will be giving you a sample exam before the mid-term so you can see exactly what to expect. If you are uneasy about your essay writing ability, here is a suggestion: Prepare one or two answers from the sample exam or the study/discussion questions before the exam. I will gladly go over your essay with you individually and show you how to improve. After both exams I will make photocopies of the best answers available for reading in my office. Students have found these samples enormously helpful. Let me know of anything else you might think of to help you do your best.

#### UNIVERSITY DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION POLICY:

To request academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact Disability Resources located in The Drahnann Center in Benson, room 214, (408) 554-4111; TTY (408) 554-5445. Students must provide documentation of a disability to Disability Resources prior to receiving accommodations.

Chit-chatting and sleeping in class: DON'T!!!! Making private comments to fellow classmates is very distracting to others (especially me). The class only lasts 65 minutes--please wait until it is over to talk to your friends. If you missed a phrase or concept, please ask me, not your neighbor. If you feel yourself falling asleep in class, please get up, go home, and take a nap. You cannot learn anything while you're are asleep and you'll rest better in bed.

Please do not hesitate to ask me questions or make comments openly during class. If you don't understand something (whether from the book or a lecture) chances are excellent that others are also confused and could benefit from clarification. Your comments (not just questions) are also welcome and are valued as significant contributions. Some of the greatest teaching comes from in-class student comments. And as an added bonus, class participation does constitute 10% of your grade.

Finally—I realize that this course requires a great deal of effort. I give you the words of Jimmy Dugan (Tom Hanks's character in A League of Their Own), who is responding to the resignation of his star baseball player because “it just got too hard”: “It's SUPPOSED to be hard. If it wasn't hard, everybody would do it. The 'hard' makes it great.”