

# History 424

## AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

University of Idaho  
Spring 2004  
Tuesday and Thursday @ 12:30 – 1:45  
Education 401

*Dr. Adam M. Sowards*

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Web: <http://www.class.uidaho.edu/asowards/> (This website is in the process of being developed.)

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 11:00 – 12:00 (Immediately before and after class is usually also a good time to have some questions answered.)

*Note to Students: It is my pleasure to do what I can to help you meet your goals in this class. If you find yourself having trouble, please send me e-mail, use my office hours, or set up an appointment to see me.*

### Course Description

This course will examine Americans' interactions with the natural environment using the analytical lens of history. It will also investigate history using the analytical lens of the natural environment. It will focus on how nature shapes what humans do and how nature is shaped by what humans do over the last five hundred years. In addition, the course will explore Americans' ideas and attitudes toward the natural world and the political struggles related to the environment. In the process of the course, we will learn much about the American past, and we will hone our skills of critical thinking. Thus, this class will teach content (i.e., American environmental history) and skills (i.e., the ability to analyze, think, and communicate critically).

### Required Books

*The following list constitutes the required books for this course. They are available for purchase at the University of Idaho Bookstore. It is possible, even likely, that you could find some of the books cheaper through online booksellers.*

- Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*
- Louis S. Warren, ed., *American Environmental History*
- Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England*
- Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920*
- Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River*
- Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*

### Assignments and Grading

Participation (15%): For this class to work well, students need to come to class prepared. To encourage this, you will be graded on your willing participation, your preparedness, and your presence. This grade will be calculated by contributions to discussions, by attendance, by in-class

assignments, and by my general observations. Students in this class represent a variety of disciplinary perspectives, and all students will benefit by the participation of others with their expert knowledge and diverse experiences.

Colonial America Paper (10%): You will write a short paper (3-4 pages) interpreting the environmental component of transatlantic contact and the development of colonial America. This first paper is designed to provide early feedback on your writing and your understanding of environmental history. It will help prepare you for your larger papers. The precise question you will be answering and the requirements will be provided later.

Incorporation Paper (25%): You will write a paper (6-8 pages) interpreting the environmental aspects of the incorporation of America into a national political economy based largely on market capitalism and democratic principles, which occurred largely in the nineteenth century. The precise question you will be answering and the requirements will be provided later. This will function as your midterm.

Twentieth Century Paper (25%): You will write a paper (6-8 pages) interpreting how changing technologies and ideas about the environment transformed Americans' experience and understanding of the natural world in the twentieth century resulting in the environmental movement. The precise question you will be answering and the requirements will be provided later. This will function as your final.

10-Minute Essays (15%): On a regular basis, you will write short essays in class. These likely will be unannounced. They are designed to make sure you are keeping up with and comprehending the reading, discussion, and lecture materials. I will drop your lowest score.

Short Profiles (10%): To demonstrate how environmental history relates to contemporary developments, you will search out a variety of manifestations of environmental issues and write short synopses (1-2 pages each) of them as an expert in environmental history. You will write a short profile of (1) an environmental organization (e.g., the Wilderness Society), (2) a current environmental issue (not a local issue) reported in a mainstream newspaper or magazine (not one dedicated to environmental issues), and (3) a local or regional environmental issue. The precise requirements will be provided later.

### **Policies**

Late Work Policy: Your grade drops one full grade for each day your work is late. You must be in class the day it is due to turn in work. If you do not come to class, your work will be counted as one day late unless you have made prior arrangements. With legitimate, documented excuses or for absences arranged ahead of time, exceptions can be made.

Grade Challenges: I am willing to entertain grade challenges provided they are submitted in writing and that you wait 48 hours after the assignment is returned before you hand in your objection. You will then need to set up an appointment with me to discuss the assignment and grade. Also, you must initiate this process within one week of the time the assignment was returned to the class. After re-evaluating a grade and meeting with you to discuss the assignment and evaluation, I may change it.

Plagiarism: To plagiarize is to present someone else's work as your own. To present someone else's work as your own means to use someone else's information, ideas or writing without explicitly acknowledging with quotation marks and/or citations that the ideas and writing are not your own. You may be plagiarizing even if you are not directly quoting. Plagiarism is a serious offense and I will give a 0 to the first assignment in which a student plagiarizes. If a student plagiarizes again, I will fail that student in the course. If you have ANY questions or confusions about plagiarism, please let me know before you turn in your work. It is essential to be using others' ideas and information; however, you just must provide credit where credit is due. You may find additional information about Academic Honesty (and dishonesty) as part of the Student Code of Conduct.

Accommodations: Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have a documented disability. Please notify the instructor during the first week of class of an accommodation(s) needed for the course. Late notification may mean that requested accommodations might not be available. All accommodations must be approved through Disability Support Services located in the Idaho Commons Building, Rm. 333, 885-7200, or [dss@uidaho.edu](mailto:dss@uidaho.edu).

## Expectations

### Students will:

- attend all classes.
- finish assigned readings and work on time and be prepared to answer questions and discuss reading content.
- spend time contemplating the basic issues discussed in class and in the reading.
- treat peers and professor with respect.
- engage in appropriate academic classroom behavior (e.g., arrive on time prepared to take notes, do not engage in social conversations or other disruptive acts, keep wireless phones off).
- do not engage in "social loafing" during group assignments.
- take independent steps to solve any confusion due to missed class (or other reasons) by using appropriate methods.
- devote ample time to the course content despite work, social and other class obligations.
- do not cheat or be prepared to accept the consequences which will result in 0 points for the assignment. (Further discipline may be appropriate.)

### The instructor will:

- arrive in class on time and be prepared to make effective use of the students' time.
- treat students and their opinions with respect.
- be available to students during office hours and at other times arranged by mutual agreement.
- make every reasonable effort to assist students in attaining their academic goals.
- assess student performance in as objective and accurate manner as is possible and as quickly as possible.
- keep abreast of current events as they pertain to the course.
- continue to research and study American environmental history.
- challenge students to learn as much as possible.

## Reading and Assignment Schedule

Please note that this is an approximation of what we will be doing and changes may be necessary. If so, they will be announced to the class. Also, the reading assignments are to be complete before you come to class on the day they are assigned.

**Thursday, January 15:** First Day of Class, No Assigned Reading

**Tuesday, January 20:** Introduction to Environmental History: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ix-xii, 3-7; Louis S. Warren, ed., *American Environmental History*, 1-3; Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, xiii-xv, 1-26.

**Thursday, January 22:** Aboriginal Environmental History: Steinberg, 11-20; Warren, 4-48.

**Tuesday, January 27:** Contact and Consequences I: Steinberg, 21-38; Warren, 49-72; Merchant, 29-68.

**Thursday, January 29:** Contact and Consequences II: Merchant, 69-111.

**Tuesday, February 3:** Making the Colonial Landscape I: Steinberg, 39-51; Warren, 73-100.

**Thursday, February 5:** Making the Colonial Landscape II: Merchant, 112-145.

**Tuesday, February 10:** **Colonial Paper Due:** Rationalizing Resources: Steinberg, 55-70.

**Thursday, February 12:** Commodifying Forests: Warren, 101-124; Merchant, 149-197.

**Tuesday, February 17:** Transforming the South: Steinberg, 71-88; Warren, 124-140.

**Thursday, February 19:** Urbanization and Disease: Warren, 141-159.

**Tuesday, February 24:** Early Mechanization and Industrialization: Merchant, 198-270.

**Thursday, February 26:** War and the Continued Transformation of the South: Steinberg, 89-115.

**Tuesday, March 2:** The Far West: Steinberg, 116-137; Richard White, *The Organic Machine*, ix-xi, 3-29; Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 1-62.

**Thursday, March 4:** Incorporating the Plains: Warren, 160-179; Isenberg, 63-122.

**Tuesday, March 9:** Domestication and Conservation: Isenberg, 123-198.

**Thursday, March 11:** **Incorporation Paper Due**

**Tuesday, March 16:** **Spring Recess, No Classes**

**Thursday, March 18:** **Spring Recess, No Classes**

**Tuesday, March 23:** Conservation: Resource Management and Class: Steinberg, 138-156; Warren, 180-211.

**Thursday, March 25:** Conservation: Cities and Wilderness: Steinberg, 157-172, Warren, 212-243.

**Tuesday, March 30:** Food: Steinberg, 175-205

**Thursday, April 1:** Power: White, 30-88.

Tuesday, April 13: Suburbs, Automobiles, and Emerging Modern America: Steinberg, 206- 225;  
Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, xi-xiii, 1-86.

Thursday, April 15: Waste, Pollution, and Its Challengers: Steinberg, 226-238; Warren, 244-270;  
Rome, 87-118.

Tuesday, April 20: Emerging Movements: Steinberg, 239-261; Rome, 119-188.

Thursday, April 22: Federal Conservation: Warren, 271-297; Rome, 189-219.

Tuesday, April 27: Land Use and Environmental Racism: Warren, 298-323; Rome, 221-270.

Thursday, April 29: Northwest Salmon and Technology, White, 89-113.

Tuesday, May 4: Backlash: Warren, 324-335.

Thursday, May 6: Assessments, Prospects, and the World: Steinberg, 262-285; Warren, 336-346.

Final Exam Scheduled, Tuesday, May 11, 1 – 3  
Final Paper (i.e., Twentieth Century Paper) due at this time.